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BLANCHE SEYMOUR.

2468 B

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ERMA'S ENGAGEMENT."

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"Das Leben ist keine Lustfahrt, sondern theils eine Kampfes-, theils eine Pilger-weise."

"What we have loved we love forever,
And its life is the life of these lower ways;
It flows through the heart like a singing river,
It swells with the tears of darker days,
And fills all the past with golden haze.
What we have loved we love forever.

* * * * *

And what from our hearts this love can sever!
Afar from the earth and its evil eye,
It dwells in the glorious light of its Giver,
It swells with all spirits pure and high,
Waiting to clasp our hearts when we die:
What we have loved we love forever."

THE AFTERGLOW.

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BLANCHE SEYMOUR.

CHAPTER I.

"MARY, you're asleep!" exclaimed Mr. Radclyffe, who, having woke himself by his own snoring, felt it due to his dignity as a husband to find fault with his wife for what he had just done himself.

"How can you say so, Charles?" retorted Mrs. Radclyffe, who, however, had been ~~awoke~~ by that same snore. "I'm not thinking of being asleep. On the contrary, I've been thinking, as I sat here in my comfortable chair, in this charming room, by this nice fire, how sad it is for those poor Seymours having to leave their beautiful place and go and live in a nasty, poky house in London."

"Upon my word, so it is! I suppose the poor devils have hardly anything to live on?"

"Very little; the mother has two hundred a year, I think, which the creditors can't touch, and that, with whatever Ralph earns, is all they have."

"Humph! I don't much fancy that Mr. Ralph. A selfish dog! all he gets he'll keep for himself. I hate that fellow!"

Mr. Radclyffe hated most people. It was a way he had.

"I can't think why you hate poor Ralph; he's very clever and has done well hitherto."

"So's the devil clever! and I don't know what you call doing well! He was put into the army and, forsooth, found idleness didn't agree with him. Snob! as if a man can want a better profession than holding her Majesty's commission! Then he took to farming, and gave that up. And now, what does he mean to do? Live on his mother, I should think."

"No; they've got him some appointment in a Government Office;—not much

money, I'm afraid, though: and he writes for the papers, I fancy."

"Precious stuff he must write! Fancy reading bosh written by a snob like that! How many g's are there?"

"Two—Mabel and Blanche. To tell you the truth, Charles, I was thinking how it would be if we asked one of them to come and stay here for a little while. It would be a real kindness."

"Well, do, my dear. Which will you have?"

"Well, I should like to have Blanche—"

"Is she the handsome one? don't have an ugly woman, for Heaven's sake! I hate ugly women."

"But Blanche isn't ugly; she's very pretty, only not quite so handsome as Mabel, and I should like her to come, as I think Leila is fond of her. In fact, one reason I thought of asking her was on Leila's account. You see, now that Miss Young is gone, she has no companion, and it's very dull for her, poor dear child! and Blanche Seymour is such a nice, sensible girl, it would be pleasant to have her, and a kindness to poor Fanny Seymour."

The Fanny Seymour in question was a distant cousin of both Mr. and Mrs. Radclyffe, who had just been left a widow with three children—a son and two daughters. During the last years of his life the deceased Mr. Seymour had speculated largely, and with the usual success that attends country gentlemen who enter on such courses. On his affairs being looked into it was found that he was deeply involved, and everything had to be sold to satisfy the numerous claims. The estate was not entailed; and when the creditors had got all there was to get, the family were penniless, with the ex-

ception of a trifling sum settled on Mrs. Seymour which they could not touch. She took a small house in Kensington, and had to begin, late in life, to learn the difficult lesson of how to make sixpence do the work of a shilling. It was not an easy task. She had always lived in affluence. Her children had been luxuriously brought up, and had never known what it was to go without a thing because the family purse was not long enough to procure it. To come down from Seymour Park and a house in Grosvenor Square to an infinitesimal tenement in Kensington was a sore trial, but Ralph Seymour held out golden hopes to his adoring family, and they were quite willing to take him at his own estimate,—at least his mother and Mabel were, and if any doubt entered Blanche's head, she kept it to herself, attributing it to her own unamiability. It was Blanche whom Mrs. Radclyffe wished to invite to Deerscourt, hoping she would be a companion to her daughter Leila. For Leila Radclyffe was a sore puzzle to her mother. Never did mother less understand her child. Mrs. Radclyffe was practical, fussy, genial; inclined to *embonpoint*, unable to read a book for five minutes without falling asleep, and full of a holy horror of Popery. Leila was tall, slight, with a manner as provokingly composed and statuesque as her mother's was the reverse; utterly unpractical, much given to moonlight musings, poetry, painting, and High Churchism. Since the departure of her governess Mrs. Radclyffe had been sadly exercised in her mind: the more so as she had no one to consult or pour forth her trouble to, for her married life was an exemplification of the truth of much that Mr. Mill has said as to the confidence existing between husband and wife.

Mr. Radclyffe's temper was so tyrannical and unreasonable, that he was treated in his own family either like a fool or a baby. He had two sons and one daughter, and neither they nor his wife ever dreamed of consulting him about any important event if it could possibly be kept from his knowledge, or of telling him what they really thought on any subject; and Mrs. Radclyffe would as soon have thrust a knife into her daughter's heart as communicate to her husband her fears that she would become a Roman Catholic, or her anxieties about her, feeling sure that he could not enter into them, and that the only effect would be "to turn him against the poor child." But when Leila refused an offer of marriage from a

man in every way unexceptionable, for no reason that her mother could comprehend, the longing for some one to consult, and whom, at the same time, Leila would like, became pressing; and though Mrs. Radclyffe would not exactly have said that Mr. Seymour died with a special view to her convenience, still, she did feel that "good Providence had been very good" to her in the matter, and it was "borne in upon her" that nice, sensible Blanche would in some unknown way be able to help her. So having taken Charles "when he was good," as she termed it, and got his consent, she wrote to Mrs. Seymour—"I would not be so thoughtless as to ask you, dearest Fanny, to let Mabel come, as, in your most severe afflictions, I know what a comfort an eldest daughter must be, but if you could spare dear Blanche to us for a little while it would give us extreme pleasure, and the change might do her good." Mrs. Seymour was glad to avail herself of any variety for her girls, and accepted the invitation—though it was a trial to part with Blanche even for a month;—so one snowy day in February that young lady started for Winterton, and was met at the station by Mrs. Radclyffe and Leila. She was received by the former with effusive tenderness; by the latter with a manner evidently intended to repress her mother's gushing.

Blanche Seymour was at this time twenty years of age; tall, with a graceful, bending figure, and very small hands and feet. She was not beautiful, and there was too much intellect in the face for mere prettiness, but she had a most bewitching pair of dark, hazel eyes, and wavy brown hair drawn back from a white, broad forehead and coiled round her head rather in oriental fashion. She had pearly teeth and rosy lips, a most impertinent little nose, rather *retroussé*; and withal a look of great decision about her chin. She had, besides, the most perfect complexion in the world—creamy white and delicate carmine that went and came with every changing feeling. Altogether the countenance was charming, from the mingled look of sense and sensibility. She wore little crinoline, and long, trailing dresses, which made her look taller than she really was, and imparted somewhat of a mediæval character to her appearance. Whether from nervousness or shyness, she had a way of blushing when spoken to which was very attractive; and as Mrs. Radclyffe brought her into the drawing-room to tea,

on their arrival at Deerscourt, and she took off her heavy jacket and hat, and stood, with her slight figure and her complexion looking more dazzling from contrast with her dark dress, Mr. Radclyffe had no reason to fear that he had got an ugly visitor. As to her character, she had a keen appreciation of the ludicrous, a strong sense of justice, and a hatred of anything like tyranny or unkindness. As she sat at tea talking with animation of her home and journey she presented the strongest possible contrast to Leila, with her Madonna-like face, and large, poetical-looking gray eyes, which had, somehow, a look of perpetual depression in them.

Mrs. Radclyffe, who had formed the resolution of keeping Blanche altogether at Deerscourt if she could, was not a little anxious as to the impression she would make on her husband, and, to cover her nervousness, talked incessantly. Her conversation was at all times largely interspersed with endearing adjectives, but when she was not at her ease it may be said to have consisted of *dear*, *dearest*, and *darling*. "And, dear Blanche, how did you leave your dearest mother and dear Mabel?"

"Oh, really mamma is wonderfully well, considering: you would laugh to see her go out shopping of a morning, buying meat and green-groceries, and looking as if she had known all her life what potatoes are a pound: but it amuses her. Our cook's ideas of puddings are abnormal, so mamma is learning to make them from a cookery book. The result is not always satisfactory," continued Blanche, looking down and smiling as if to herself, "but one mustn't expect too much in this world."

"And where is Mr. Ralph?" inquired the Squire, in as courteous voice as he could assume when speaking of any one he disliked.

"He's at home. He goes to his office every day."

"And does he eat your mother's puddings?" inquired Leila. She spoke as if puddings were a sad necessity of our nature, to be ignored if possible.

"Well, occasionally; he doesn't show that appreciation he might of his mother's cookery, and often dines out."

"I should think so," said Mr. Radclyffe contemptuously.

"And what does dear Mabel do?" inquired Mrs. Radclyffe.

"She does the lady's-maid part—makes and mends. She trimmed the hat I wore

to-day. I used to dust the drawing-room. I can dust, though I can't trim a hat or make a dress."

"That's a real nice girl!" exclaimed the Squire when Leila had taken Blanche upstairs. "No nonsense about her! How bright and good-tempered she seems!" and Mrs. Radclyffe felt that at least one of her difficulties was over.

"I'm so glad you're come," said Leila as they went up-stairs, in quite a genial manner, very different to the stately measured tone she assumed before her parents. "It's so dull and lonely here. How beautifully you are dressed! I so admire that uncommon style. Why won't mamma let me dress so? Here am I, figged out in the height of the fashion, with a crinoline as big as a house."

"I never wear much crinoline, and my dress is partly economy. We can't afford to follow the fashions now. What a lovely little room!"

"Yes, isn't it? it looks out over the lake, and from this window you can see the sun rise, and then the woods are so splendid."

"I had no idea Deerscourt was such a lovely place! you can see the hills ever so far away."

"Yes; I sit for hours looking out at night."

"Oh, Leila, you don't know how Mabel and I miss the dear country! Mamma and Ralph don't so much mind—Ralph talks now as if none but fools like to live there—that's his way: he always depreciates what he can't have. Perhaps he is wise, but I'm weak enough to miss the birds and flowers and the poor people in our village. I knew them all and they knew me. I mind that more than anything."

Leila looked on with a sort of shy sympathy, as if half ashamed of the feeling.

"Do you really dust the rooms?" she asked, after a pause. "Doesn't it make your hands red and dirty?"

Blanche held out her small, white ones, streaked with blue veins, and laughed a low, rippling laugh. "Soap and water soon remedy that."

"But why don't you let the servant do it?"

"One wretched maid, Leila, to do everything! Just think how tired she must get! I make the beds, too. I can't make dresses like Mabel, so I do what I can."

"And does Aunt Fanny like your doing it?"

"If left to herself she wouldn't mind, but Ralph puts it into her head that I

oughtn't to do it; he says it's *menial*. I tell him, 'who sweeps a floor as to God's law, makes that and the action clean.' I don't say the floor would be exactly what you'd call a new pin after my sweeping, though," she added, laughing.

"Come, and I'll show you my room," said Leila, and she led the way to one also looking over the lake, and hung with several exquisite engravings.

"Oh, that lovely Sistine Madonna!" exclaimed Blanche, "how fond I am of it!"

"You don't think it wrong, then?" said Leila in a tone of relief. "Mamma will hardly come into my room because I have these pictures, and groans and clasps her hands whenever she does. She thinks it Popish to have that *Ecce Homo* near my bed, and says none but Papists ever have the Virgin in their rooms."

"I didn't know she was so very Low Church in her views."

"She wasn't; in fact, I don't think she knew the difference between High and Low, or ever heard of them, till our rector had to go to Cannes for his wife's health, and he got an Irish clergyman to come and take the duty for him, who is awfully Low Church. He is an Orangeman and fearfully bigoted! I really believe he doesn't think there ever was a good Roman Catholic. He fancies our Church sprang up three hundred years ago or so, like a mushroom, and would ignore St. Augustine and all the Fathers, if he ever heard of them, which I doubt."

"How truly awful!" said Blanche sympathizingly.

"But bad, as he is, his wife is a million times worse! Just fancy! You know the Comptons, a very old Roman Catholic family, live at Hazledown, about five miles from this. They called on the Millars when they came, and they would not return their call! Mrs. Millar says we are told in the Bible, 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate.' *Them*, she says, means the Roman Catholics, and Mr. Millar says he should feel as if the Rectory had been polluted if they put foot in it. I told him Mrs. Compton was Mr. Hylton's right hand in the parish next to mamma, and Mr. Compton his most intimate friend."

"Did he survive it?"

"I'm sorry to say he did. When mamma showed Mrs. Millar over this house she brought her into my room, of course, and she went into holy hysterics over my poor pictures, and because I have that scroll with *Dominus illuminatio* on it."

"Latin *must* be very Popish," said Blanche laughing.

"Yes, and she put it into mamma's head, that's the worst of it. Dear mamma would never have thought of it herself, but now she says my room is a 'grief of heart to her,' and she thinks that if I'm not a Roman Catholic, I'm next door to it."

"But surely Aunt Mary" (Mabel and Blanche always called Mrs. Radclyffe "Aunt Mary," though she was only a distant cousin) "knows you better than to mind what such people say."

"Oh, Blanche, mamma is so odd and so easily led," said Leila, as if relieved to be able to speak freely. "I don't believe she can really think it, but she acts as if she did, and is always trying to improve the occasion, if you know what I mean, and giving *coups de patte* at Popery and Jesuits and all that. If anything could make me a Roman Catholic it would be the way she goes on."

"But, Leila, you never thought of being a Roman Catholic?"

"Never. It never entered my head. I never, till lately, even thought of the differences between the Churches."

"What horrid people those Millars must be!"

"They mean well, I dare say, but they have not added to my happiness. Conceive! I have a class in the Sunday-school, and when I had done the Catechism and Hymns and all that, I used to read to the children. A little while ago I was reading 'Agathos' to them, and Mr. Millar stopped me after school and told me he could not conscientiously allow such a book, as he considered it of a most pernicious tendency; and he won't let me read them 'The Shadow of the Cross,' or 'The Distant Hills.'"

"But, my dear, the man must be a natural curiosity! I long to see him."

"Oh, you'll see him soon enough. He tried to get mamma to stop my playing the organ or piano on Sunday, or the Lord's Day, as he calls it, but luckily Horace was at home, and said it was all bosh, and as he has more influence with her than even the hateful Millar, that comfort is left me."

"Then he doesn't go in for all this twaddle?"

"Oh, no; he hates the Millars as much as I do, but then he hates all parsons except Mr. Hylton. So does papa. But how selfish you must think me to bore you with all my troubles just on your arrival; only it's such a relief to speak to

some one who can feel for me. Now come, and we'll see if Adèle has unpacked your things. We must be ready for dinner, otherwise papa storms."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN the two girls went into the drawing-room, they found the Squire there in high good humor, ready to talk to Blanche.

He was a tall, fine-looking man, who must in his youth have been very handsome, but the face was spoiled by a look of habitual discontent and ill-temper.

"Well, Blanche, and how is Mabel? is she really so pretty as they say?"

"She's not pretty—she's lovely," said Blanche warmly.

"How I should like to see her!" said Leila; "it's so odd I've never met her, though I know you so well."

"And are you and she one?" asked the Squire.

"One? what do you mean?"

"Why, are you friends, or do you quarrel?"

"I should think not. I don't think I could live without Mabel."

During dinner Mr. Radclyffe suddenly addressed Blanche:

"Do you like parsons? There's a fellow here who will curl your hair, and no mistake—a most unmitigated parson! Mrs. Radclyffe thinks him a Latter-Day Saint."

Now, one of the objects of Mrs. Radclyffe's life was to prevent her husband talking about parsons or religious topics while the servants were in the room. The moment he began, she invariably addressed him in a pleading tone, "*Charles, je t'en prie,*" but she never got much further, for he went on, raising his voice, with the amiable desire of showing that he would not be dictated to by his wife. She then made palpable efforts to change the conversation, while Leila sat perfectly silent, as if turned to stone. The tact and ingenuity displayed by Mrs. Radclyffe, in warding off the conversation from these dangerous subjects, were beyond all praise, and certainly merited the deepest gratitude of the clergy, had they known of her exertions in their behalf. But Blanche was uninitiated into the domestic mysteries of Deerscourt, and instead of throwing cold water on her entertainer's remark, asked him what he meant by "curling her hair." Mrs. Radclyffe looked imploringly to Leila for help,

but to come to the rescue of Mr. Millar was an effort she was not equal to, and she would not open her lips.

"Dear Blanche, have you been to any balls?" asked Mrs. Radclyffe, rendered desperate by the combined danger of having her visitor prejudiced against Mr. Millar, and having him ridiculed before the servants.

"Balls! Oh, Aunt Mary!—not since poor papa's——" She stopped, and Leila looked unutterable reproaches at her mother, whose face assumed a badgered look, as well it might.

"Of course she hasn't, and you know it," said Mr. Radclyffe, in a brutal voice. "Blanche," he went on, "this parson is a dreadful fellow. He says long prayers out of his own head, and preaches for an hour. I hate the brute! I mean to give up going to church."

He had no intention whatever of doing so, but knew it plagued his wife to say it.

"Charles, how can you say so? Mr. Millar is a good and holy man, if ever there was one. I only wish you were half as good."

"Thank God I'm not! When goodness takes the form of a parson, I'll stick to the devil."

"Why do you dislike him?" asked Blanche, who could not help laughing. "Is he oleaginous?"

"He is," said Leila, solemnly, in a low voice. "How did you know?"

"I always associate the idea with extempore prayers."

This was an aside between the girls.

Mr. Radclyffe went on:

"I dislike parsons on principle, and this brute gives you no chance. Good or bad, no matter what you do, below you must go;" only he expressed it in more "vigorous Saxon." He was in the habit of garnishing his speech with sundry expletives, unpleasant to reproduce, but adding considerably to its force.

"Do you like extempore prayers?" asked Leila solemnly.

"No, I don't," was the emphatic response. "No prayers can come near, in simple beauty, those in the Prayer Book—at least, to my mind."

"And to mine; but Mr. Millar doesn't think so."

"When I was confirmed, I had to answer a lot of questions," said Blanche; "and one was, *Why is extempore prayer to be discouraged?* I didn't know how to answer it, so I asked Geoffrey Rivers, my cousin, who is a clergyman, and he told

me to put, *Because no one ever heard an extempore prayer that wasn't nonsense.*"

"And did you?" asked Leila.

"Well, no; I thought it too flippant for the occasion."

Mrs. Radclyffe was overwhelmed. She did not know the meaning of *oleaginous*, but felt sure something disparaging was intended. She resolved, if she could keep the word in her head, to look it out in the dictionary, as to confess her ignorance would, she imagined, lower her in Blanche's and Leila's estimation.

At the same time she lamented inwardly that young ladies nowadays used words which were so uncommonly difficult to understand.

Blanche rose from dinner with an uneasy sensation that something had gone wrong, but it was impossible to read anything from Leila's face. In the presence of her parents she assumed an air of impenetrable reserve.

Mrs. Radclyffe, in the drawing-room, set herself to counteract the evil effects of her husband's remarks on Blanche's mind by extravagantly praising the Millars and all they did, during which eulogium Leila maintained a rigid silence.

"Did dear Leila tell you that Mrs. Millar has got a new governess, who is a great German scholar? She asked me if Leila would like to take German lessons with her girls. It will be so nice; and, my dear, if you like, you can go too. Mrs. Millar will be very happy. I told her you were coming."

"Am I to go to the Rectory, mamma?" inquired Leila.

"Yes, darling. Mrs. Millar thought you would like to have the lessons with Julia and Kate Millar."

"I wonder she is not afraid I shall pervert them," said Leila coldly. Blanche went to bed that night feeling that Leila, with all her worldly advantages, was not much to be envied. She fell asleep, and it seemed to her that she had been hours in bed, when she was startled by her door being very stealthily opened and a somewhat portly figure in a gorgeous scarlet Turkish dressing-gown entered, shading the candle. Blanche was not given to screaming, but she sprang up, considerably alarmed at the apparition. It was Mrs. Radclyffe. "Oh, Aunt Mary! how you frightened me!"

"My dear, I'm so sorry. I hoped you would not be asleep," and to the girl's astonishment she burst into tears—real genuine, childish tears.

"Dear Aunt Mary, what is it?"

"Oh, Blanche, I'm so miserable, so unhappy about Leila. I can't help coming to talk to you. I have no one to advise or tell me what to do. Now, do get into bed, dear, and I'll sit down by you. First I'll just poke up the fire, only quietly, that Leila mayn't hear," and she put on as much coal as if she meant to sit there all night. "You are such a dear, good girl, Blanche, I think I can safely talk to you," and she dried her eyes and sat down on the side of the bed. It was all so sudden, that Blanche felt completely mystified.

"Why are you unhappy about Leila?" she asked.

"Oh, my dear, altogether. Oh, Blanche!" another burst of tears—"do you think she will be a Roman Catholic?"

"A Roman Catholic! what makes you think so?"

"Oh, my dear, I'm so afraid of it. She has her room full of Popish pictures and texts. She has the Virgin Mary over her chimney-piece, and did you see what a large cross she had round her neck?" and in an access of grief the poor mother started up and began wringing her hands and walking about the room. Blanche could only look on in intense astonishment. At last Mrs. Radclyffe sat down again somewhat calmer. "Blanche, what can I do?"

"Aunt Mary, I don't know what to say. I never saw anything in Leila that could lead me to think she was likely to be a Roman Catholic. Mabel and I have pictures in our rooms, but I'm sure we never thought of being Roman Catholics."

"But then you don't dislike good, pious clergymen. Leila hates Mr. Millar—such a good, religious man—just because he isn't High Church. She calls him a Dissenter, and finds fault with everything he does, and with the services at the church."

"I don't think she dislikes him because he is not High Church, but because he is so illiberal; and from what she told me, I should say he must be rather uncharitable to all who are not of his way of thinking."

"Are you High Church, my dear?" asked Mrs. Radclyffe, with a mysterious, glimmering hope that perhaps, after all, this terrible High Churchism might not be such a very dreadful thing.

"Yes, I think so, certainly. I'm not extreme, but I'm not Evangelical, most assuredly."

"But what *are* High Church people, Blanche? what do they want to do?"

do they want us all to be Roman Catholics?"

A sense of the incongruity of time and place for the discussion of High Church principles so overcame Blanche that she could have laughed outright had it not been for the look of real distress and perplexity on her aunt's face. She had, in her nervousness, rolled her handkerchief up into a round, hard ball with which, from time to time, she rubbed off the tears that at intervals stole down her cheeks. In as soothing terms as she could think of, Blanche assured her that, as far as she knew, the views of the dreaded party did not go so far; and though she could not deny that some eminent High Churchmen had seceded to Rome, still she succeeded in calming her aunt's mind considerably.

"Really, you dear Blanche, you have quite comforted me, and I will try not to make myself so unhappy: but would you mind having the German lessons with Leila? you see, I think knowing more of the Millars in their own house may make her like them better, and, Blanche, as you are so good, perhaps you wouldn't mind just saying every now and then that you like Mr. Millar, and how good you think him, to Leila. I'm sure she would mind what you say."

"Aunt Mary, I can't do that. If I don't like a person I can't say I do, and I'm sure I sha'n't like him, but I'll have the German lessons if you wish."

"Thank you, dear. But now, Blanche, I have another trouble—greater even than this, and which I wouldn't breathe to any one but you for the world. I can trust you, can't I?"

Blanche promised secrecy.

"It's a thing about Leila that weighs on my mind morning, noon, and night, and causes me to shed torrents of tears," and Mrs. Radclyffe proceeded to demonstrate the truth of her statement by indulging in another copious flood. Blanche began to feel seriously alarmed at the mystery about to be divulged to her.

"Don't cry so, Aunt Mary," she said, with a feeling of impatience she could not quite repress. "What is it? what has Leila done?"

"Blanche, I hardly know how to tell you—but I'm so afraid—I mean—in short, Leila has taken men *en horreur*."

"Taken men *en horreur*?" exclaimed Blanche, feeling more and more mystified. "What can you mean?"

"Why, that she has taken them *en horreur*—that she hates them, and will never

marry," and every vestige of a tear disappeared from Mrs. Radclyffe's face as she realized to herself the enormity of such a misfortune.

"But," said Blanche, "I suppose that is because she never met any one she likes?"

"No, it isn't," said Mrs. Radclyffe decidedly. "It is that, as I say, she has taken men *en horreur*. She says that all marriages, or nearly all, are unhappy; that men are tyrannical, and make their wives miserable, and that she won't marry. My dear, Sir George Conway proposed to her a short time ago; he admires her immensely, and has a lovely place about ten miles from here, and—would you believe it?—she refused him."

"But I conclude she didn't care for him."

"But she won't care for any one! What am I to do with a girl who won't like any man? Why shouldn't she like him? Such a nice man, Blanche, good-looking and everything. No, take my word for it, it is as I say. She is just like Charles's cousin,—and mine, too, in fact,—Fanny Radclyffe, who took men *en horreur*, and would never marry. You may believe me or not, as you choose, Blanche, but you know I'm a truthful woman—and I tell you Fanny Radclyffe had offers from five different men—all good, dear, handsome, delightful men, any one of whom you would have been proud to marry, and she refused them *all*—ALL," and Mrs. Radclyffe gradually raised her voice and got up and poked the fire vigorously in her amazement at such a phenomenon, while Blanche lay in bed, convulsed with inextinguishable laughter. "And now," resumed Mrs. Radclyffe in a tone, half disgust at the said Fanny's obstinacy, half bewilderment at men's infatuation—"though her hair is quite gray, there's a charming man who wants to marry her; he asked her again the other day, and she refused."

"Perhaps she has money?" said Blanche in an explanatory tone.

"No, she hasn't; at least, nothing to speak of."

"Well, I suppose she thinks she is happier unmarried? Some women do, you know."

"Nonsense, my dear; how can she be happier unmarried? and how shall I feel at having a daughter who is not married? Here, I've three children, and only one married! Thank God Charlie is married" (this last was an aside). "Horace is engaged, but the young lady can't leave her

father yet, and for aught I can see, it will be years before she can, and if Leila doesn't marry, I'm sure I don't know what I'm to do."

"And is Uncle Charles so anxious to get rid of her?"

"My dear, I'm not anxious to get rid of her," said Mrs. Radclyffe impatiently; "her husband would be a son to me: and that is one reason I regret Sir George. I should have seen so much of her, Leighton Court being so near."

"I mean, does Uncle Charles want her to be married?"

"I never speak about it to him, my dear. It doesn't do to consult men about these things, and I trust to you, Blanche, never to speak to Charles of what I've said to you about Leila."

"Then you've not told him your fears about her becoming a Roman Catholic?"

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Radclyffe, in a tone of unbounded astonishment, and with a peculiar accent on the *dear*, "I should as soon think of flying! Tell Charles? When you are as old as I am you will know that it is useless to consult a man, or go to him in any perplexity one may feel. Men are so violent, and only see one side of a thing, somehow; if I told Charles it might make him unkind to dear Leila—he would go on more than ever against Mr. Millar, and it *could* do no good, for he couldn't help me. I've not said a word to Horace, even, though, of course, he knows about Sir George."

"But how can I help you?"

"Well, dear, I think being with you may give a healthier tone to her mind; and as you don't think all men brutes, perhaps you may persuade her that some married lives are not wretched."

Blanche sighed. "I don't know about all, Aunt Mary, but poor mamma's was not a bed of roses."

"Ah, poor dear! I know she had bitter trials! So have I, and I blame myself a great deal about Leila. You see, when Charles aggravates me, and is so unkind as he often is, and does chafe my temper more than I can bear almost, I used to go to her for comfort and tell her—one does long for some one to tell one's troubles to—but it soured her so and weighed upon her spirits, I found I must not do it; and now, my dear, I assure you, no matter how unreasonable he is and how he tries me, I keep it to myself. I pray to good God to help me to bear his temper, and I never say a word to Leila."

Blanche, infinitely touched, threw her

arms round her aunt's neck and kissed her, feeling deeply for the poor, lonely heart, thus driven to seek help and comfort from a comparative stranger. The caress to which she was so little accustomed seemed to draw forth all the tenderness of Mrs. Radclyffe's nature. She overwhelmed Blanche with gratitude for her sympathy, and lavishing endearing epithets on her, bade her good-night, declaring she felt a load taken off her mind, and she would now go and say her prayers and sleep quite happily.

"I couldn't rest till I had had this talk with you, though I fear I've disturbed you, my dearest."

Blanche felt that a new page of life was opening before her, and was puzzled how to reconcile the odd mixture of strong common sense, evidently sincere religious feeling, child-like simplicity, and deep affection with the silliness, worldliness, and selfishness which her aunt's conversation disclosed. She could not sleep again for hours, and rose the next morning heavy and unrefreshed. She went down to breakfast expecting to find Mrs. Radclyffe as late and headachy as herself, but to her amazement she found she had been up for hours, writing, and superintending her soup kitchen, and looking as active and bright as if she had never known a trouble. This was Blanche's initiation into life at Deerscourt.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning after breakfast Blanche and Leila started for the Rectory for the German lesson. They were shown into a large, uncarpeted room ranged round with books, no curtains on the windows, a deal table in the middle, with a couple of short wooden benches near it on which were seated, looking miserably cold, two pretty but awkward girls, Julia and Kate Millar, and on a rush-bottomed chair sat a girl apparently about seventeen years of age, with a very high color and dark hair and eyes—the new governess. Miss Peyton. The face was sad and thoughtful, and touching from its look of extreme youth, almost childishness, mingled with an effort to appear old and dignified, as became a governess. There was an air of sensitiveness about the whole figure that struck Blanche particularly. The room had a desolate, comfortless appearance, and the

only bright thing in it was the young teacher with her brilliant coloring.

Mrs. Millar came in before any introduction could take place, and proposed that they should go into the dining-room for the lesson, as being warmer and more comfortable. She was a tall, high-shouldered woman with prominent nose and teeth and an expression of studied amiability, as if a naturally unyielding and impatient temper was kept under strong control. She wore a cap, and had her hair rolled up into large rings on each side of her face. Her love for her children was apparent in every look and motion, but to Miss Peyton she spoke in a tone of cold superiority that jarred painfully on her young visitors. She assigned them seats round the dining-room table, placing the governess, who looked shrunk up from cold, farthest from the fire, and then taking up her work sat down in an easy-chair. The girls were all shy, and it was a trying ordeal for the poor frightened little governess, who in a trembling voice, which she endeavored in vain to render steady, proposed that they should begin to read *Wilhelm Tell*.

"I wish you to speak German to the young ladies," said Mrs. Millar from her seat by the fire, as if she had been speaking to a servant. A vivid blush and a look of patiently dignified assent were the only reply.

"But, mamma," said Julia, "I don't understand."

"My darling, Miss Peyton will explain what she says to you," was the answer, in a tone so genial and affectionate that it seemed incredible it should have proceeded from the same speaker.

After a time Mrs. Millar left the room, and Blanche immediately proposed to Miss Peyton to change places with her. "You look so cold, and I'm too hot."

The girl appeared surprised, but after a little demur accepted the offer. "I do suffer so from cold," she said apologetically.

In about half an hour Mrs. Millar came back, and at once noticed the change. "Miss Peyton, I placed your seat at the other end of the table. The young ladies like to be near the fire."

Tears sprang to the child's eyes, and she rose without speaking.

Leila looked at Blanche, who, coloring indignantly, said, "I made her change; she was so miserably cold. Pray don't move, Miss Peyton."

"I'm warm now, thank you," said she, wishing to avoid any discussion.

"I recommend you to come back to your place, Miss Seymour," said Mrs. Millar.

"No, thank you. I prefer remaining where I am," said Blanche, making a strong effort to speak politely.

The moment the lesson was finished she rose hastily. "Leila, let us go. I can't stand this. I never saw anything so shameful."

"We're to stay to lunch," said Leila; "and mamma will be in a state if we go before."

"I won't stay. I can't see that woman treat that poor child so."

"Didn't I tell you she was a brute? See how these Evangelicals love! But we must stay, Blanche, else mamma will be put out. Let us go and speak to the poor little thing."

But the poor little thing was gone, and Julia begged them to go to the drawing-room. There they met Mr. Millar, a tall, good-looking man, unmistakably a gentleman, and not "oleaginous," as Blanche saw at a glance. He had a slight Irish accent, but no brogue.

"Well," said he, "how did the German go off? How do you like Miss Peyton?"

"Immensely," said both the girls at once. "What a pretty little thing! and I'm sure she is clever," added Blanche.

"She's young and very shy," said he. "She's a Tractarian (he pronounced it Thractarian, but this was to make it more forcible), too." And he smiled a little and looked at Leila.

"Is she? Aren't you afraid of her?"

"She very honorably told me when first I saw her," said Mrs. Millar; "but as she is so very young, Mr. Millar and I hope the poison can't have sunk deeply into her mind, and we think the evil may be counteracted by living with us and hearing the Bible—the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible—fully expounded on true Protestant principles."

"Kate," continued Mrs. Millar, "go and tell Miss Peyton she may come down to the drawing-room."

On the receipt of this exquisitely courteous message, Miss Peyton came in blushing painfully with overwhelming shyness, and then dinner was announced. After a solemn grace they all sat down. "We have a custom of each repeating a text at dinner," said Mrs. Millar to Blanche, in a low tone. "The children cannot be too early familiarized with the Bible, and the servants (a man and a maid waited) may glean some word in season which may bring forth good fruit."

And accordingly Mr. Millar, when he had finished carving, and before commencing his own meal, while potatoes and beer were being handed round, repeated a text from the Sacred Volume, and was followed successively by the children, of whom there were several, as is usual in clerical homes,—“holy vegetables” being “fruitful boughs,”—some with their mouths full, some empty, as the case might be. When it came to Blanche’s turn, she gravely repeated a verse from the Apocrypha.

Had a bomb fallen on the dinner-table, Mr. and Mrs. Millar could not have looked more astounded. Had they got a Papist—perhaps a Jesuit—in their house? Was that a verse from the Douai Bible? Was it possible their children’s and servants’ ears had been so polluted? An energetic protest was the only remedy.

“I don’t know such a verse in the Bible,” said Mrs. Millar, in a voice of grave rebuke.

“Don’t you? It’s in the Lesson for the day,” said Blanche innocently.

“May I ask where you found it? I know my Bible pretty well, but I’m not acquainted with any such verse,” said Mr. Millar.

“I assure you it’s in the first Lesson for the day.”

“To-day being the 24th of February,” he said.

“St. Matthias’s Day,” observed Blanche suggestively.

“Oh, then it’s in the Apocrypha,” he said in an accent of contempt. “I thought only Papists read that!”

“It’s marked as the Lesson for the day in the Calendar,” said Blanche, coloring deeply.

“True Protestants read the inspired Word of God,” said the clergyman sententiously.

“But surely, Mr. Millar, there’s no harm in reading the Lesson appointed by the Church; the Articles do not condemn the Apocrypha.”

“I act on the authority of the Bible, *not* of the Church. To my mind, one of the most pernicious characteristics of the Tractarian School is their exaltation of the Church above the Bible.”

“Never argue with a man,” was one of Blanche’s rules, so she made no reply; and Mrs. Millar, whose turn it now was, repeated in a voice of solemn denunciation—“If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the

book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book,” leaving the “assistants” to draw what conclusion they pleased as to Blanche’s future fate.

“Oh, Blanche, you’re too delightful!” exclaimed Leila the moment the two left the Rectory. “I should never have thought of horrifying them by quoting a verse from the Apocrypha. Did you do it on purpose?”

Blanche laughed—her laughter was infectious—low, soft, and spontaneous, with nothing harsh or forced about it. “It was very naughty, but I’m afraid I did. Mrs. Millar’s face became gray with horror. I had it on my tongue to say, when he talked about the ‘inspired Word,’ that the Council of Trent declared the Apocrypha equal in authority to the Old and New Testament.”

“Oh, why didn’t you?”

“My dear, he would have had a determination of Protestantism to the head on the spot: besides, I always think of Geoffrey’s story of a lady he went to call on, who, he said, knocked him down—metaphorically, of course—with a volume of the Fathers the moment, almost, he entered the room. But wasn’t it a splendid rise? that woman’s face I shall never forget!”

“Isn’t she a wretch?”

“Horrid! I wouldn’t be that poor little governess for something. Conceive making her get up from her seat!”

“Poor girl! she sat so shy and silent at lunch, it went to my heart. I tried to talk to her, but she seemed afraid to speak.”

“Mr. Millar isn’t so bad, Leila: he’s a gentleman, which covers a multitude of sins.”

“Well, I’m glad he has got some good qualities.”

Mrs. Radclyffe received them, eager with curiosity to know how everything went off. Blanche related it all in her own bright, vivacious way; and though Mrs. Radclyffe did not the least see the point of having quoted the Book of Ecclesiasticus, she laughed as if she understood it, and even, on being good-humoredly pressed by Blanche, acknowledged the incongruity of texts and dinner.

“And now, my dears, I’ve something to tell you which I think will please you. I thought it so dull here for dear Blanche without a young man to talk to her, that I wrote yesterday to dear Horace asking

him to come down for a little while, if he can get leave."

Blanche flushed crimson. "Aunt Mary, what made you do that? I'm not dull at all, and I don't want to be talked to."

Mrs. Radclyffe's face assumed the frightened look it always did when she found her well-meant efforts not only not appreciated, but even condemned, by her family.

"I thought you would have been pleased," she pleaded.

"Pleased, my dear aunt, at your thinking that I can't exist for a month without a man dangling after me!"

"My dear, I never thought so, but in my time young ladies would not give 'thank you' to go anywhere unless they had a man to amuse them; and dear Horace is so charming, and as you've never seen him, I was sure you would like it."

"I have no doubt Colonel Radclyffe is all you say, Aunt Mary, and I appreciate your kindness—only I wish you hadn't done it."

Leila would have expressed so much more displeasure, that Mrs. Radclyffe was thankful to be let off so easily.

"Well, Horace always does come down about this time, so he will only be anticipating his visit a little; and after all, he mayn't be able to come, so don't be put out, dear Blanche. I'm sure I did it for the best," said Mrs. Radclyffe in a lachrymose voice.

Blanche felt more annoyed than she could express. Not only was it galling to her to have it assumed that she was so destitute of resources in herself as to want a man to help her to get through the day, but she shared the dislike of all clever girls to paragons.

And Horace Radclyffe was a paragon in the eyes of his adoring family. The one point on which Mr. and Mrs. Radclyffe were entirely agreed was this Horace-worship. For them everything that was perfect in man was embodied in that one word. The portion of Mrs. Radclyffe's conversation with Blanche which was not occupied in jeremiads about Leila was taken up in eulogies of her "darling Horace." Blanche's secret feeling was that a man so worshiped must be odious; but, though it would not be fair to say that he was not at all spoiled, it may be fairly acknowledged that he was wonderfully little so. He was in a cavalry regiment, and to hear his parents talk one could not fail to be convinced that all the valor of the British army concentrated in his person, and that every one

of our military successes since he had joined was due directly or indirectly to him. The fact of his being in a dragoon regiment made them take all the cavalry under their especial patronage, and Blanche Seymour soon discovered that to get what she termed "a mild rise out of Uncle Charles and Aunt Mary"—a process to which she was much inclined—she had only to hint even that the band of any infantry regiment was superior to the bands of the cavalry in general, or the ———th in particular.

In truth, Blanche found her visit anything but dull. The strongly-marked characteristics of the family were a perpetual source of interest to her. She had met Leila in London twice before when both were visiting a mutual relation, but in the excitement and general whirl of the season she had not really got to know her. The girl was not happy—that was very evident. She had no occupation or interest in life. There was no sympathy between her and either of her parents. There was no scope for her energies in the parish; and if her mother asked her assistance in any domestic matter, the two natures had so few assimilating qualities that they jarred on each other till both became nearly mad with suppressed irritation. She did not care for out-of-door pursuits, or rather the perpetual constraint she felt in her father's presence made everything with which he had anything to do distasteful to her. He was a man most trying to live with, making every one about him miserable by his tyranny and extreme selfishness. Yet he had good impulses—was at times generous and good-natured, and there was a frankness about him that was very winning. He was one of those men, unfortunately common enough, who think themselves exemplary husbands and fathers, though they lead their wives and children such lives that the death of one or the other is the only prospect of relief to the wretched victims. The extraordinary elasticity of Mrs. Radclyffe's spirits enabled her not only to exist under this life, but to *live*. She had perfect health, and after years of trial was *almost* as hopeful and energetic as when first she married. Not so Leila. She had not naturally buoyant spirits; and what she had seen her mother and brothers suffer and suffered herself had soured her, and crushed out all the joyousness of youth. Life seemed to her made up of oppression on one side and suffering on the other; and her mind dwelt on every tale of domestic misery

she heard till she grew morbidly sensitive, and saw a tyrant in every man and a victim in every woman.

It was in vain that her mother, with unutterable simplicity, when she became aware of this, dwelt on the happiness of married life, and carefully tried to conceal everything that could militate against the views she wished to inculcate. Her nervous start the moment she heard her husband's step was too sad a proof to her child that she was drawing on her imagination for her facts, and every fresh domestic storm was a triumphant refutation of all she said. In this way there seemed great danger that the flower which ought to have bloomed into beauty and brightness would be blighted forever.

"I'm of no use to any one," she said to Blanche; "I've nothing to do."

"You can be of use to your father and mother."

"How? papa takes no pleasure in talking to me, though his face lights up when you come into the room. And what am I to talk about? Politics are a forbidden subject, for he's such a rabid Tory, that unless I agree with him in abusing every one who doesn't want things to go on as they did in the days of Adam, he says I'm a Radical, and raves, and mamma looks like a martyr. I mustn't talk of religion, nor of the neighbors, for he hates them all; nor of books, for he never reads. What am I to talk about?"

"It certainly is a lamentable picture," said Blanche.

"I wish I had a sister!" sighed Leila.

"Perhaps you may marry?" suggested Blanche.

"Never. I've seen too much misery ever to do that. To lead a life of perpetual restraint, like dear mamma; to have a child, perhaps, to be as wretched as I am, or to be badgered, like poor Charlie."

"But, Leila, all marriages are not unhappy. I know heaps of people who are as happy as the day is long. Think how delightful to have some one to take care of you and to tell everything to."

"Mamma doesn't tell papa everything. If she did no one could live in the house. Did your mother tell your father everything?"

"Well, not always," said Blanche hesitating; "he got so irritable at last she couldn't, but, Leila, he was very fond of her; don't think he wasn't, though sometimes I could not help blaming him; and mamma would give all the world to have him back. Mabel and I often wonder,

when we see her agonies of grief even now, if she ever thinks how unhappy he often made her. I suppose not. She always speaks of him as if he had been an angel; and, Leila, he was kind and good till trouble soured him." She wiped away some tears, and there was a long silence. Then Blanche said—

"Leila, I think you are wrong to let your mind dwell on all the miseries of life. Every man can't be bad and unkind. It would be too horrible if it were so."

Leila sat gazing out of the window at the distant hills—a look of almost horror in her large gray eyes. "Blanche, I can't tell you how I feel about it. I never read a book that I don't think—'I wonder if the man who wrote it made his wife and children wretched!' and I never now read the life of a celebrated man for fear of finding out something in that way about him."

"But, Leila, think of all the good men there have been in the world—men who seem only to have lived to do good; and think what kindness one meets from men."

"Blanche, do you know, a neighbor of ours, Sir George Conway, asked me to marry him a short time ago?"

"And you wouldn't?"

"No. I told him I couldn't. Mamma fumed dreadfully, and Horace was vexed too. Papa doesn't know. He's gone abroad now."

"What sort of man is he?"

"Well, I never was more surprised than when he asked me. It was one day I went over to the Comptons, and he came to lunch, not knowing I was there. He seemed quite glad to see me; and when we were walking in the garden he told me he liked me very much and all that, and asked me to be his wife. I can't think why he should like me. I never knew he cared for anything but hunting and shooting."

"How old is he?"

"About twenty-eight, I suppose, or thirty; I don't know exactly. He and Horace were at Eton together. I've known him all my life, that is, as far as one knows a man from meeting him occasionally, and then his soul always seemed to me to centre in his gun or his yacht, for he is a great yachtsman."

"Well, I wish you could have liked him if he is good and kind."

"Oh, he'd be good and kind enough till we were married. They're all that, and then when you're in their power they show their real characters."

"I think you exaggerate, dear," said

Blanche, after a long pause. "I don't deny there are (heaps of unhappy marriages.) It always makes me sick to think of it, but God can't have meant us all to be miserable. I wish you knew my Aunt and Uncle Rivers. They are the dearest old pair. You would see then there are some people happy, even after years of married life. They are devoted to each other. She coos over him like a dear old dove as she is, and he is so proud of her, his eyes brighten when she comes into the room; and Geoffrey worships his father. He wouldn't say all fathers make their children miserable. I wish you could see them."

"I wish I could," said Leila; "I'd study them, you may be sure, as a new experience in my life."

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT a week after his mother had written, Horace Radclyffe made his appearance at Deerscourt. He was a tall, powerful-looking man, very handsome. Blanche thought, as she looked at him on the evening of his arrival, she had never seen a more beautiful face. It was oval, the nose perfect, the complexion clear olive, the eyes violet—hair, eyebrows, and sweeping moustache blue black. Yet there was something wanting—what, she could not say, and her experience of life was not enough to enable her to give expression to that which she instinctively felt. That sweeping black moustache concealed the mouth, the truest index to character, or some lines there, together with a certain steely look in the otherwise beautiful eyes, would have given the clue she wanted. Those eyes might darken splendidly in anger, but it is doubtful if a look of *real* tenderness ever softened them. Prejudiced as she was, Blanche could not but acknowledge that his parents had grounds for their partiality. However much he may have been spoiled, or whatever his secret opinion of himself may have been, his manner was perfectly unassuming. Next to his extreme beauty, his gentleness was the most remarkable thing about him.

Blanche was so annoyed at his being asked on her account that she would hardly speak to him, but he did not obtrude himself at all on her notice, though one who knew him well would have seen that he acknowledged her presence by the

change in his voice when she was in the room. There was even a certain shyness in his way of speaking to her, and he was terribly puzzled how to address her—Miss Seymour sounding formal when his father called her Blanche;—yet her manner, perfectly polite, but with a shade of *hauteur* in it, forbade any approach to intimacy.

After dinner she was beset with inquiries as to what she thought of him. "You are so clever yourself, my dear," said Mrs. Radclyffe, "that I'm sure you must appreciate him: I long to know your opinion."

Blanche was too polite to say that she didn't think "cleverness" was what the late Mr. Artemus Ward would have called Horace's "fort;" but she could safely praise his good looks, and did so enough to satisfy even his mother.

Miss Seymour was very musical. Her playing and singing were the perfection of domestic music—not powerful or brilliant, but inexpressibly sweet and soothing: her voice breathed the soul of music, with its deep pathos—one of those voices with tears in it, that rouse up memories of one hardly knows what past happiness enjoyed, perhaps, in that "afar" whence surely we come "not in entire forgetfulness." Such voices are a "relic of Eden," and waft back to all who come within their reach an echo from the land that is very far off, awaking, even in the most callous and material, some vague longing to return there—some hitherto unfelt aspiration after good.

Mr. Radclyffe, highly susceptible to all musical influences, was a changed man, softened and gentle, while listening to Blanche's singing.

On Horace the effect was magical, though she would hardly ever sing before him—such voices as hers are very capricious, and the presence of a stranger is often enough to paralyze them. Whatever was the reason, she would not sing to him; but he would stand about on the stairs on the chance of hearing her. Though always polite, her manner was not so bright and pleasant to him as to the others, and she was slightly satirical. He felt piqued; and the pair had one or two rather sharp sparring matches during his stay, which, to his mother's surprise, he prolonged to three weeks. It must be confessed that her conduct was not very amiable. He proposed riding—she declined; he challenged her to billiards—she declined, courteously, but firmly. It was evident she would not be amused.

The only subject on which she spoke to him freely was Leila, and there was a kindness and affection in all he said about his sister that impressed her favorably.

"Mother," said he, one day, "you wrote to me to come and entertain a young lady, but she refuses to be entertained. I never met a more independent young woman: it's in vain I exercise all my little wiles. I suppose, as I'm engaged, she thinks it trouble thrown away to speak to me."

"Horace!" exclaimed Leila indignantly, "I'm sure such an idea never entered her head. I do wish you wouldn't say such things—it's so vulgar."

"Well, Leila, for some reason or other, she won't speak to me. I've done my best to be agreeable, but it's no use. She's rather apt to be aggressive, too."

"She doesn't want to be entertained, if mamma would only have understood it."

"Still, when a fellow takes the trouble to come all this way she might be civil to him."

"But, Horace, don't you think she's a nice girl?" inquired his mother anxiously.

"Mother, I dare say she is; she's uncommonly nice-looking, I know, and her figure is perfect. How she blushes!" he added, in a tone of wonder.

"Yes; and you tease her to make her blush," said Leila, "which is so ill-natured."

"She looks so pretty, I can't help it."

"But you shouldn't. It's so uncomfortable to feel the color mounting into one's face."

"Well, you'll confess I've done my best, mother. It's not my fault if she's dull."

His mother kissed him, declaring he was "the dearest man in the world."

He left before Easter to spend that season with Sir Henry Wentworth, the father of the young lady to whom he was engaged.

CHAPTER V.

THE German lessons went on steadily at the Rectory, and the two girls soon became very intimate with Emily Peyton, the governess. Blanche had a wonderful power of attracting to herself all who were in trouble—a gift of sympathy instinctively felt by those in need of it. Leila, with every wish to be kind, was cold in

manner, and her voice and eye did not make the joys and sorrows of others her own as Blanche's did. The two used often to accompany the Millar children in their walks, and before long the story of Emily's life was poured into Blanche's willing ear.

"Have you many brothers and sisters?" she asked one day.

"We are thirteen in all," was the answer, in a tone of pride.

"Thirteen! how dreadful! and are you the eldest?"

"No; I have two brothers older. It is delightful to have so many brothers and sisters, only we are not at all rich (poor child!); in fact, we are—are very poor, that is why I'm so anxious to succeed here. Do you think Mrs. Millar likes me, and that I get the children on?"

"I'm sure you get the children on. I can't tell about Mrs. Millar."

"I do hope she does. I try to do my best, though I'm so lonely sometimes," and her eyes filled. "I think it was kind of her to take me, as I'm so young, especially when she found I was not Evangelical."

"How did you hear of her?"

"Papa saw an advertisement in the paper, which I answered, and Mrs. Millar wrote to me to come and meet her at Winterton. I was so frightened! You can't think how dreadful it was, going to be looked at!"

"Poor girl!"

"I thought of mamma and Archie, my lame brother, and that gave me courage."

"And did she ask you if you were Evangelical?"

"She asked me where I went to church, and when I told her, she said the clergyman was a Tractarian, and she couldn't have me. I don't know if I looked very sorry, but she asked me almost directly what my views on Baptismal Regeneration were. I told her as well as I could; and then she said she would consult Mr. Millar, and asked me to promise never to teach the children any Tractarian doctrines, if she tried me."

"And did you?"

"I promised faithfully, only I had to confess I didn't know quite what Tractarian doctrines were. It sounded so dreadful to be called a Tractarian!"

"Poor girl!" said Blanche again.

"And then she wrote to me, but such a letter, that mamma wouldn't consent to my coming at first."

"Why?"

"She spoke as if I should try to make

her children Roman Catholics. The letter was a sort of examination for heresy, Archie said. She asked me if on my bended knees I prayed for the help of the Holy Spirit."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Blanche.

"She said in the letter that she would rather expose her children to any bodily danger than have their minds imbued with the deadly poison of Tractarianism. Mamma wanted me not to come, but I persuaded her to let me try."

She then went on to tell how she had a crippled brother, whose sole delight was music; but their piano was so bad that it was a constant trial to his sensitive ear, and the ambition of her life was to be able to buy him one. A sort of yearning love for all her family was apparent, but a special share was reserved for her mother and this lame brother. Her father had been in the army, but had sold out and got a civil appointment, which, however, he did not succeed in keeping: and it was plain from what Blanche could glean that he was of an unsettled, roving disposition, constantly trying his hand at new occupations, and failing in all. He had now migrated to the country, and was attempting farming, in which his daughter expressed a modest doubt of his prospering.

"It's well there are more boys than girls of you," said Blanche.

"Well, I don't know. My eldest brother has two hundred pounds a year, but he says it isn't enough for him to live on, so he can't help mamma and papa; and though he always says he will try to get Archie a piano, he has never been able. I think if I had had two hundred pounds a year for two years I should have got him one. How long do you think it will take me to save enough to get one out of twenty-five pounds a year?"

"Twenty-five! is that all you have for teaching all those children?"

"If you knew how glad I was to get it!" said the girl, her face flushing.

"It's shameful!" said Blanche indignantly.

"You see I'm very young," remarked Emily apologetically. "Mrs. Millar said I was young and ignorant, and she couldn't give more. I was only seventeen a few days before I came here."

"I wish I were rich," said Blanche, "and I'd help you to get a piano, if you would let me. Unfortunately, I'm as poor as you are, and I can't even earn twenty-five pounds a year."

"Are you poor?" asked Emily, looking at her with calm curiosity. "You ought

to be glad you're not a governess. You don't know how lonely and dreadful it is! I always thought I liked children, but I'm getting to hate the sight of them, and the perpetual noise makes my head ache."

"Are the Millar children hard to manage? they seem dear little things!"

"I don't suppose they are worse than others, only having them all day long is such a pull. Were you ever homesick?" she asked, looking up suddenly.

"Never; I've never been away from home long enough."

"Pray to God that you never may. It's an awful feeling. I've been nearly mad from wanting to see mamma and all of them. The night before you came I felt so miserable that I made up my mind to run away home the next day, no matter what came of it. After I made this resolution I fell asleep, though for nights before I couldn't close my eyes, and suddenly I woke up, and I'm quite sure I heard a voice say to me, 'Emily, bear on a little longer: God will help you!'"

"But there was no one there?" asked Blanche.

"No; no one could have been there. Who cared for me in the house, or who would call me 'Emily'? No; I'm sure God sent an angel to help me, I was so utterly wretched that night; and the next day you came."

"But, my dear, what good did I do you?"

"Oh, I've felt better ever since you came. It *was* kind of you to give me your place by the fire that day; and then I talk to you about home, and my brothers and sisters."

The truth was, Emily Peyton had conceived for Blanche one of those passionate attachments, largely mingled with reverence and admiration, often felt by young girls for women older than themselves, and she was so artless, she showed it in every look and word. Her nature was being frozen up in the, to her, ungenial atmosphere of the Rectory, and this bright, sympathetic being to whom she could expand, claimed her warmest devotion. Faber has said, "Religious people are an unkindly lot." It is too true of many of them, and Mrs. Millar's conduct to the poor young creature, shy, lonely, and homesick, who had charge of her children, did not form any exception to his sweeping condemnation. She treated her with marked and distant coldness, never spoke to her except about the children, made her take long and exhausting walks, much beyond her strength, and

left her to spend the evenings alone in the dreary, unfurnished school-room. But, in fact, this was the happiest portion of Emily's day, for she was free to devote herself to her books, and study was a passion with her. She lived in a world of her own, peopled with the characters of whom she read, and the relief of being without the children, whom she had with her, without intermission, from seven in the morning, besides two of them sleeping in her room, made these evening hours inexpressibly precious to her.

Mrs. Millar told her she wished to make "the Lord's Day" as much a day of rest as possible; but by the time she had been twice to church, taught in the Sunday-school for two hours and a half, and her own pupils for an hour, she found there was little time left for Sabbath repose. Yet, after Blanche's arrival, when her homesickness passed away, she was not unhappy. The daily walks, fatiguing as they were, were an ever-recurring delight.

"The earth and every common sight"

were for her

"Appareled in celestial light;"

and she was so wrapped up in her books, and in her desire to improve herself and be able to earn more money for her mother, that she was unconscious of much that went on around her. Then she expected nothing; and though keenly alive to kindness, unkindness passed unheeded, for she had had it so impressed on her that the moment she became a governess she became also a social Pariah, that she took insult and discourtesy as the natural order of things, and accepted them as the portion of any girl or woman who had to earn her own bread, or that of others, to be borne patiently "for mamma's and Archie's sake." That there was injustice or want of Christian charity in such conduct never entered her head. She was too young to vex her soul with such questions. She suffered in silence. Not so Blanche Seymour. She fretted and fumed, as it was her nature to do, and underwent all the suffocating feeling of indignation which a generous mind experiences at the sight of wrong and injustice it is impotent to remedy: and, being of a practical turn, she and Leila discussed every plan they could think of to help the poor girl, and free her from the Millar yoke.

"Could we write a novel and give her the money?" suggested Leila.

"Oh, no, Leila," was the reply, in rather

a contemptuous tone; "it's no good to write a novel unless you can find a publisher. Ralph has written novels, and wasted his time, but no one will take them. No; if we could find her a place where they would pay her decently and treat her like a Christian. It's hard to know what to do. I suppose Mrs. Millar would say it was no business of ours what she pays or does, but my blood boils at giving the poor child twenty-five pounds a year, and getting all that work out of her. I wish I were married, and had three children, and I'd ask her to come and be their governess directly."

Leila subsided into complete silence at the idea of benefiting any one at such a cost.

CHAPTER VI.

LEILA so visibly brightened and improved under Blanche's influence that Mrs. Radclyffe made every effort to get her to prolong her visit, but after Easter an irresistible longing to go home seized her. Mrs. Radclyffe could not understand this at all. If her husband or Leila had not liked her, why then, of course, she could not stay at Deerscourt; but when they liked her so much and she could be of such use, it did seem unaccountable that she should wish to leave a beautiful country place with every luxury to return to a poky house in London where, by her own account, she dusted the furniture. And she was of *such* use! She talked to Mr. Radclyffe and kept him in good humor, so that his wife and daughter could in some measure enjoy their breakfast and dinner in peace. She was so free from angles herself, and so soft and feminine, with all her sprightliness and cleverness, that she never rubbed him the wrong way, nor did he snub her as he did every one else he came across. Her tact in warding off dangerous topics was un-failing. She did not change the subject palpably, like her aunt, but so judiciously that he never saw how completely he was being managed. Like all people with a keen sense of humor, she was large-hearted, nor did she confound great things with small, and Mr. Radclyffe's originality was a continual source of amusement to her. Many of the sallies on which his wife and daughter looked with unmixed horror were to her simply delightful, as showing the light in which a half-re-

claimed mind viewed men and things. For as half-reclaimed he always struck her. She never conversed with him without thinking of some old Norseman with a coating of nineteenth century civilization and polish which had in some vague way only reached the mind; and the same was true to a great extent of Horace. Both had the savage virtues largely developed: courage, endurance, and a rough sense of truth and honor; but they were grossly material, and Horace's remark—"what rare gallops across country a fellow might have up there," as he beheld the "moon walking in brightness," was thoroughly characteristic. Both looked with the curiosity, not unmingled with awe, which distinguishes the savage mind, on the mysteries of nature and religion. "With what body we shall rise," whether we shall be known to each other in that far-off land to which we are traveling, and anything connected with astronomy, were to both unfailing topics of interest; and that Blanche would discuss these without being horrified at the freedom of his remarks, was the secret of the pleasure Mr. Radclyffe took in her society. She drew a distinction between what was really wrong and what only seemed to be so, and could make allowance, to an extent extraordinary in one so young, for the way in which the same things presented themselves to different minds. But even she found a *cordon* being gradually drawn round the subjects it was safe to broach; freedom of religious discussion was a real distress to Mrs. Radclyffe and Leila; gossip about their mutual friends was to be avoided, as one of his "Norse propensities," as she termed them, was an utter contempt for "counter-jumpers," under which name he included every one whose ancestors, even generations ago, had been in any way connected with commerce. As pure *sang azul* is rarely found in this nation of shopkeepers, in spite of the novelists, whose heroes and heroines, descended in a direct line from the Conqueror and his barons, are enough to people a kingdom, it was difficult to find a family whom Mr. Radclyffe did not think he was honoring by associating with. "The army was the only profession for a gentleman," according to him, and any one who embraced any other had no claim to admittance into polite society. Luckily Blanche was an ardent politician; and she soon found politics, contrary to the general rule, to be the one safe topic. Mrs. Radclyffe did not care about them,

and Mr. Radclyffe would discuss them with her without quarreling. She was what he called a Radical, of course, but he had hopes of converting her, and they talked over the affairs of the nation every day, very much to their own satisfaction and amusement.

And yet Blanche, who possessed all these valuable qualities for keeping a troublesome man in order, and so procuring a little respite for the rest of the household, wanted to go back home, where there would be no exercise for what was plainly her vocation; for though there was Ralph Seymour, and it was true all men wanted managing, still some require a less skillful hand than others, and no doubt Mabel and his mother were equal to him till he married, when the task would be joyfully given over to his wife. Mrs. Radclyffe well remembered the relief she felt when her eldest son, Charlie, took to himself a partner, into whose hands she could conscientiously deliver up the charge of him. In her heart she could not quite acquit Blanche of a certain amount of ingratitude in persisting in going home. After all her kindness to her, it did seem odd to talk of being homesick! She would much like to have written for Horace again, but her last experiment in that way had not turned out very well, "and girls were so odd nowadays they didn't seem to care for handsome young men." However, Fortune favored her, for one day, quite unexpectedly, he appeared at Deerscourt.

Blanche drew in water-colors very well. She was engaged on a portrait of Leila, as a present to her mother, and was only prolonging her stay till it should be finished. There being neither shooting nor hunting to occupy him now, Mr. Radclyffe transferred his attention to this picture, and favored the young ladies with his presence in Leila's boudoir, a boon for which, it is to be feared, they were not duly grateful. He knew absolutely nothing about painting, but that was no reason why he should not give Blanche advice on every step of her work. It was during one of these *séances*, while the merits of Reform were being ardently discussed, that Horace entered the room. His look of surprise on seeing his father made Leila laugh.

"They told me mother was out, and I should find you up here," he said, shaking hands. "Miss Blanche, I didn't know you were an artist. What a capital likeness of Leila!"

His arrival broke up the sitting, and Blanche left the room.

"That's a wonderfully clever girl," said Horace, when she was gone. "What a lot of things she can do! She can just sing! and I suppose now she can talk any amount of languages?" he added interrogatively. He continued to look at the portrait which was still on the easel, as if overcome with the magnitude of Blanche's acquirements.

That evening he went up to her, coffee-cup in hand. "Miss Blanche, I'm sorry to hear you are going to run away. Must you go, absolutely?"

"Indeed, yes, Colonel Radclyffe. I think I've made a visitation."

"Who's tired?" he asked, smiling. "We are not. I don't know what Leila will do."

"I shall be sorry to go too, only——" She looked up at him in a deprecating sort of way, as he stood, tall and stately, before her, "I do so badly want to see mamma and Mabel."

"They are fortunate. However, you must come again. I'm particularly sorry, as I hoped to have overcome your objection to ride. There's a horse here which would carry you beautifully. Will you let me persuade you to try him to-morrow?" He sat down beside her on the low sofa.

"I've no habit here, Colonel Radclyffe, so I can't; but I'm much obliged to you all the same."

"Couldn't we devise a habit? We could pin on a shawl, or something. You ride beautifully, I know."

"Who told you so?"

"Oh, I've heard," he replied, smiling. "Won't you be persuaded?"

She shook her head. "I would rather not, I assure you. I couldn't ride without a habit."

His disappointed look was the most delicate flattery a woman could receive.

"You'll carry away a new stock of political ideas," he said, after a pause, alluding to a vehement discussion they had had at dinner.

She laughed. "Uncle Charles amuses me more than any one I ever met. How astonished he would be to wake some morning and find the world governed on his principles!"

"I expect he wouldn't much like it," said Horace.

"I tell him that, to be consistent, he ought to do as a neighbor of ours used to do—travel up to London in his own carriage, because he wouldn't encourage

railways. He goes about in knee breeches, and the people call him Old Protection."

"I dare say he's very proud of the name, and doesn't see how absurd he is making himself."

"He looks on himself as the last of the Britons, and would denounce you as a degenerate specimen of Young England."

"That's something like Sir Henry Wentworth. Did you ever meet him?"

This was the first time he had spoken to her of the Wentworths; though, of course, she knew of his engagement.

Alice Wentworth was an only child, motherless, and heiress both to her father and uncle. She was about twenty-five, good-looking, and with but one fault, in Horace's eyes, viz.: that she would not consent to marry him at once.

"I never saw him," said Blanche, in answer to his question; "but I've heard a great deal of him from Leila."

"You would like him. You and he would talk politics by the hour. I think you would like Alice, too," he added, with a sort of shy smile.

"I'm sure I should, from what Leila has told me. She is so devoted to her father."

"But, Miss Blanche, though, of course, she's quite right to be devoted to her father, don't you think she ought to consider me a little? I want her to be married at once, but she keeps putting it off because she's afraid she couldn't take the same care of him."

"Well, as she's such a good daughter, you may be sure she'll be a good wife."

"I'm quite sure she will. I tell her, if she would only consent to our being married, I would help her to take care of him, and we could all be jolly and happy together."

"She could no longer be solely devoted to him, though. I suppose you would think you had some claims?"

He smiled. "That's just what she says; but, Miss Blanche, don't you think I have some claims now? What should you do under similar circumstances?"

"It's so hard to know. When there are two duties, both seeming equally imperative—well—I suppose I should choose the one nearest."

"But which is the nearest? My idea is that a girl ought to give up father, mother, everything, if she cares for a fellow really."

"I can't agree with you there. A girl couldn't have much strength of affection who could do that. I know I wouldn't do it. I should think, if I was worth

having, I was worth waiting for, if my father's delicate health was the cause of the delay."

"That's just what she says, again," said he, looking down thoughtfully, with a half-smile. "Well," after a pause, "I've come to the conclusion that young ladies are all pretty much alike:—all capricious, and—slightly obstinate, if I may be allowed to say so."

"Because Miss Wentworth won't leave her sick father to be your wife, and because I won't ride without a habit?"

"No; but because they stick to a thing, not for any good reason, but just because they've said it."

"I thought you said they were capricious?"

"Well, isn't it caprice makes you refuse to ride?"

"No; I've given a good reason for my refusal."

"Will you ride if I get you a habit?"

"No; I wouldn't give you so much trouble. I'm going in a week; in fact, it would be impossible to have one in time."

"Nothing is impossible, Miss Blanche, where there is a will. Consent to ride, and I'll have a habit the day after tomorrow for you."

"I wouldn't give you all that trouble for the world, though I thank you all the same."

"The best thanks would be to accept my offer."

"You see I can only give you thanks, not the 'best thanks,'" she said, smiling.

"Then I think I'm right in saying you are rather obstinate."

"And I think I'm not far wrong in saying you are—slightly persistent." And she glanced at him with her laughing eyes.

"I shall send for the habit, and see if the sight of it won't vanquish you."

"Pray don't, Colonel Radclyffe," she exclaimed, suddenly becoming quite grave.

"I must beg you will not. I would much rather not ride."

"In that case I yield, of course," he said, bowing; "but may I be permitted to say that I think the word 'capricious' still applicable?"

"I'm not capricious in this instance, I assure you," she said gravely; "however, as we are not likely to agree, we won't discuss it any further," and she resumed her work.

Her refusal to sing gave him a better excuse for taunting her with caprice; and as he was not sparing in using his advantages, the week they spent together

was passed in a series of disputes. Like Oberon and Titania, they never met that a quarrel did not ensue, so that a fresh fear took possession of Mrs. Radclyffe's mind. Horace disliked Blanche and she him: they fought incessantly, and she would never renew her visit to Deerscourt. She bitterly regretted that they had ever met, and felt more and more puzzled by the young ladies of the present day. There was Leila, who would not marry; Alice Wentworth always putting off the time; and Blanche Seymour declaring she hated a man dangling after her all day, and instead of appreciating her dear son's attentions, seeming infinitely to prefer those of his father.

"I suppose, Miss Blanche," said Horace, coming one day into Leila's boudoir, "that you think me unworthy of hearing you sing, so you won't waste your music on me?"

"I don't, Colonel Radclyffe; I would sing if I could, but I never can before strangers. My singing is of a very domestic kind."

"How you would denounce my selfishness if I could sing and refused to do so for your pleasure."

"I shouldn't be so absurd," she retorted. "I should simply believe what you said, and not press you further."

"Young ladies want pressing; they always refuse at first."

"I think you draw on your imagination for the young ladies you are always maligning. Your own experience cannot have taught you that No is the feminine for Yes."

"One's experience goes for nothing in the study of young ladies. The moment you think you begin to know them they break through every rule, and you find yourself all at sea again."

"Why, the other day you declared they were all alike: all capricious and obstinate."

He laughed. "Well, so they are; only the caprice and obstinacy vary sometimes."

"Blanche isn't obstinate," said Leila.

"Then I've always been mistaken in the meaning of the word."

"What your brother calls obstinacy in me he would call reasonable firmness in a man."

"Well, I think young ladies ought to be pliable and yielding."

"Do you?" she retorted. "I wish you would show us one of these model young ladies! Poor, miserable creatures they must be, without any backbone."

"There you are quite mistaken, Miss Blanche. My idea is that a girl ought to have plenty of what you call backbone, only she ought to be ready to give in when necessary to the right people."

"That means that she ought always to give in to you," said both the girls at once.

"It doesn't at all follow. I only tell you what my ideal is. I don't say I've ever met it."

"You don't mean to say Alice doesn't always give in to you?" said Leila laughing.

"Alice is like other young ladies," with a glance at Blanche out of his blue eyes.

The day she was to leave he appeared in the morning equipped for traveling. "I hope, Miss Blanche, you will allow me the honor of escorting you up to town."

In vain she protested that she must henceforth travel alone, and was quite capable of doing so. Mrs. Radclyffe wouldn't hear of such a thing, and she had to submit. Horace accompanied her to her mother's door, and there took leave of her, expressing a hope that he might be allowed to call and inquire for her in a day or two.

CHAPTER VII.

BLANCHE'S return was hailed with as much delight at Rutland Villa, Kensington, as her departure was regretted at Deerscourt. There was an element of brightness about her that made her presence like perpetual sunshine, and it was impossible to know her, even for a few days, without feeling her absence a blank.

"Oh, Blanche, it's too delightful to have you back, you dear thing! We've been so lonely without you!" exclaimed Mabel, embracing her again and again.

"I thought I should never get home," returned Blanche, turning to kiss her mother once more.

Mabel Seymour merited all her sister's eulogies on her beauty. She was tall and slight, with wavy chestnut hair, violet eyes, with long, silky eyelashes, and a perfect complexion. She looked sweet and amiable, but her face had not so much character about it as Blanche's had.

When the first joy of meeting was over, she said, "Blanche, I've such a surprise for you! What do you think has happened while you've been away?"

"What? Do tell me."

"I wouldn't let any one say a word to you, I so wanted to tell you myself. You know Geoffrey Rivers's old aunt died a little while ago?"

"Yes."

"Well, she has left him all her money except ten thousand pounds."

"How glad I am!"

"Yes; but whom do you think she has left that ten thousand pounds to?"

"To Ralph?"

"No; to me!" and Mabel, her face radiant with delight, drew back to watch the effect of her communication.

"To you, Mabel? Oh, how delightful! How came such an enchanting idea into her head? My dearest, I'm so glad! Mamma, weren't you surprised?"

"Indeed, darling, I was. Mabel is now the millionaire of the family."

"And now, Bianca mia, I've another surprise."

"Ah, this is really delightful!" said Mrs. Seymour.

"Dear Ralph is bringing out his translation of Horace."

"Oh, poor fellow! I'm so glad! He has found a publisher at last, then. Who is the enterprising individual?"

"Now, Blanche, don't speak in that tone. The book is sure to sell, and Ralph will get a lot of money."

"And, dear fellow, he's so pleased," said his mother; "I've not seen him in such spirits for years."

By degrees it came out that the translation of Horace was published at Ralph's own expense, or rather at Mabel's, her brother having borrowed the money for the purpose on the strength of the £10,000 legacy; and that Geoffrey Rivers highly disapproved of the transaction, though Mabel indignantly observed, "It was no concern of his."

Blanche's countenance fell. "I agree with Geoffrey Mabel; I don't think it a wise way of investing your money."

"It's not *all* my money, dear; only a little. And, of course, he'll give it all back, with interest for the loan, as he says."

"Provided the book pays; but that seems to me a chance."

"Blanche, you always underrate Ralph," said her mother.

"Well, mamma, perhaps I do. I hope I may prove mistaken this time; only, as

all the publishers he showed it to declined it, I fear he can't gain much by publishing it."

"But, Blanche," pleaded Mabel, "suppose the publishers were mistaken, and it should prove a success! How delightful if he made a literary reputation!"

"As I understand it, his object ought to be, not to make a literary reputation, but to fill his purse."

The sound of Ralph Seymour's latch-key in the door ended the discussion for the time.

The first thing that struck one about Mr. Seymour was the care with which he must cultivate the quantity of moustache and beard that hung about his face. He rather affected the poet, and consequently wore his hair long, which gave him a somewhat Tennysonian aspect, though it may safely be averred that this was the only way in which he resembled the Laureate. He was a good-looking man, tall and perfectly dressed, and his manner, as he spoke to his mother and sisters, was affectionate and warm, though a stranger would have called it affected.

"Well, Blanche, here you are; we've missed you terribly, especially of an evening for the singing. I met Geoffrey, by the by," he went on, "and he told me he would look in this evening, to see how you've been faring."

Geoffrey Rivers was Mrs. Seymour's brother's son—a clergyman, strictly Anglican in principle, but tending strongly to muscular Christianity in his practice. His countenance resembled that of one of Albert Dürer's mediæval knights, and he wore a moustache and beard, which, though common enough among the clergy now, were rare a few years ago. To judge from his noble face, no earthly weakness ought ever to have tinged his nature, and his life ought to have been passed in devout meditation or heroic deeds of self-denial; but in truth Geoffrey, though the truest, most straightforward, and kindest of men, was by no means superior to the weaknesses of his sex. He was not at all above receiving complacently the adoration of the youthful feminine portion of his congregation, and had his little vanities respecting his appearance in his surplice. Though rigidly Anglican, he always preached in a black gown, having once had it delicately conveyed to him by fair lips "how well it became him with the red hood over it."

We know men ought not to be vain,—it is weak, undignified, and a thousand things more; but the fact is, all men are

vain, and we must take human nature as it is. Geoffrey would have been more perfect had he been free from this alloy; but his friends thought his little vanities were part of himself, and there was a boyish simplicity about them that redeemed them from any taint of selfishness or absurdity. Ralph Seymour's vanity was offensive, while Geoffrey's never was; and his clear, joyous voice was a guarantee of his unselfish, genial nature.

He was an only child, devoted to his parents, and very fond of his cousin, Blanche Seymour, who was in all respects like a sister to him. He had unbounded confidence in her judgment and discretion, and hardly ever did anything without consulting her. He had tremendous ideas of the respect and deference due to Woman—of her mission in the world—her influence, and so forth; and, to his mind, Blanche united in herself all that was perfect in womanhood. Not that he was in love with her or she with him; but he, unconsciously, measured every woman by her standard, and referred everything to her. He had done his best to prevent Mabel's consenting to Ralph's scheme of publishing his book at her expense, but as it was done, he hoped, at least, that Blanche would persuade her to let his father invest the rest of the money in some safe way, instead of trusting it to Ralph's wild plans: both he and Blanche were taken aback when one day that young man proposed to his sister to allow him to start some wonderful Dye Works with it. He was very eager, and full of his subject. He had studied it much, he said; was sure it would succeed, and he should make a large fortune in a few years. There were no Dye Works on a large scale, and with his knowledge of practical chemistry he would realize enormous sums. Geoffrey was not present when the proposal was made, but Mabel glanced at Blanche, to see what she thought of it.

"Are you sure, my dear boy, that the plan will succeed, and that your sister's money won't be thrown away?" said Mrs. Seymour. "I dread speculations, Ralph; we have suffered so much from them already."

"Mother, it is sure to succeed, and Mabel's money will be as safe as the Bank. Do you suppose for a moment I would advise her to her own injury?"

"Not knowingly, Ralph," said Blanche, "but you may be mistaken. You don't understand business; you confessed that was why you couldn't make farming pay;

and if you fail, nothing can bring back Mabel's money."

"But, Blanche, I can't fail. I have more experience now. I have consulted the best people, who all confess that what I propose is a want of the day. There are large works to be sold immensely under their value; and if Mabel will buy them, and let me manage them, I undertake to make her a rich woman in a few years."

"Why are they selling the works if they pay?" asked Blanche.

"Because the man doesn't understand the working of them, or devote his time to them."

"But how can you attend to them and your office at the same time?"

"Of course if Mabel trusts me with her money I shall give up the office, and devote myself entirely to the business."

"What madness!" exclaimed Blanche, sitting down in despair.

"Blanche, you look as miserable as if Ralph had failed already," said Mabel. "We are only consulting about it. Surely Ralph wouldn't give up his appointment if he didn't think he could succeed in this."

"Ralph," said Blanche earnestly, "let me entreat you not to give up your situation."

"You talk about a situation as if I were a footman," interrupted her brother angrily.

"Well, appointment—I beg your pardon; but indeed, darling, it is risking a certainty for what may never answer, and must involve you and us in ruin if it fails."

But all her remonstrances were in vain. Mabel was persuaded that it would be unkind to refuse Ralph's request; and his mother, though doubtful of his success, was not firm enough to use her influence against him. He held out a golden prospect. He would, in a short time, make money enough to repay Mabel treble, and enable his mother to move into a larger house and live in comfort, instead of in the miserable way she did now.

"But, Ralph," urged Blanche, "you hoped to get a great deal of money by writing."

"Writing is up-hill work," he replied contemptuously; "that was when I had no other opening."

She begged that at least his Uncle Rivers and Geoffrey might be consulted, but this brought down a storm on her head.

"I do strongly protest against the way

you try to import the Rivers' influence into the family. I am the natural guardian of my mother and sisters, and as capable of advising them as Geoffrey Rivers."

"I haven't that unbounded faith in Geoffrey that you have, dear," said Mabel.

"Then don't consult Geoffrey; consult any one you please. Mamma, write and ask Mr. Scriven (the family lawyer), or consult Mr. Maynard."

But this advice did not suit Ralph at all. He became very angry, accused Blanche of interfering in what did not concern her, assured her that had the money been hers, not Mabel's, he would never have tendered any advice, knowing it would not be taken, and asked her if she thought he meant to defraud his sister.

"You know very well I don't, Ralph," she answered with heightened color; "but I think you haven't the necessary knowledge to undertake such an important concern, and that more advice is needed before you embark Mabel's money in it."

"I don't know what may be your opinion, mother," said Ralph, "but as Blanche is nine years younger than ~~me~~ a girl, without any experience of the world, I think I am entitled to a little more respect from her. Allow me to say, Blanche, that your language verges on presumption."

"So it may," retorted she; "but, at least, it verges on common sense, which yours doesn't."

"Your tongue will effectually prevent your ever marrying, Blanche," said her brother loftily. "There is nothing a man hates so much as a woman who says sharp things, as I've often told you."

"Then I can live unmarried—a dreadful fate, no doubt; but I think I shall survive it. I can conceive, however, your wishing I was married at this moment and out of your way."

"Blanche, my child!" remonstrated Mrs. Seymour.

"Mamma, I'll go up-stairs, and relieve Ralph at once of my presence and of my tongue."

She left the room and wrote a note to Geoffrey, asking him to come and try to dissuade Mabel from the scheme.

"Blanche, darling," said Mabel, coming into the room after a little while, and kissing her, "I hope you don't think me unkind not to take your advice; but, you see, poor Ralph has so set his heart on this. However, we'll consult Uncle Rivers and Geoffrey."

Obedient to her summons, Geoffrey appeared the next morning, and heard the whole story. He denounced the scheme in the strongest terms. Ralph was absent at his office, and Geoffrey took the opportunity of urging Mabel to be firm in refusing the money when it must fall through. He then left them, to find out all he could about the Works—who had formerly carried them on, etc., and came the next day with a report. The Dye Works in question were set on foot originally as a speculation, and failed, and no manager had ever yet succeeded in making them pay. The man who was now selling them had been a great loser, and all those whom Geoffrey consulted expressed doubts of Ralph's succeeding where so many had failed.

"I came across Charles Maynard, and as I know he's a long-headed fellow, I consulted him; but he looked grave over it. He asked for you, Aunt Fanny, and said he often wished to call, but did not know if you received visitors yet."

"I should much like to see him. Your poor uncle had a great regard for him."

"But, mamma," said Mabel, "you know Ralph can't bear any one to call now; it's all so changed."

"Still, dear, I should like to see Mr. Maynard, and we can hear what he thinks of this plan of Ralph's."

The next day Geoffrey came to take the sisters to the Royal Academy. As they were going in a tall, gentlemanly-looking man came up, and taking off his hat exclaimed, "Miss Seymour! this is indeed an unexpected pleasure." It was Mr. Maynard. He was a friend of their more prosperous days, and had a property adjoining their old home in —shire. He had been extremely kind to them in their troubles, but Ralph disliked him, and especially resented his having bought some of the things at the sale. He accompanied them through the Exhibition, and Mabel's impulse was to ask him to call on her mother, but Ralph's dislike prevented her. However, Blanche was not so mindful of his wishes, or rather disregarded them in favor of her mother's, and told him how much the latter wished to see him. He glanced at Mabel to see if she seconded the invitation, and as though he wished it had come from her, but she was absorbed in one of Millais's pictures.

He called the next afternoon, and Mrs. Seymour consulted him eagerly about the proposed disposal of Mabel's money. He disapproved as much as Geoffrey and Mr. Rivers, but hesitated rather about ex-

pressing his opinion when he saw it displeased Miss Seymour.

In fact, opposition was useless. Ralph was bent on the scheme, and, as Geoffrey said, "the only way to put a spoke in the wheel is for Mabel to refuse the money."

"And that she won't do," said Blanche. "It would be expecting too much of her; I doubt if I could do it myself under the circumstances. She adores Ralph, and would do anything he asked her."

"Then you must trust the matter to Heaven," said he; "we've done all we can."

CHAPTER VIII.

OF all the ills of poverty one of the most trying is, surely, the inferior servants it forces on one. Not that the wretched maids themselves are to be blamed: it is in the nature of things that they should be bad servants. Where one person has to do everything she must be a perfect wonder if she does not do all badly.

The Seymours were particularly unlucky. They had brought up with them from the country an Amazonian-looking damsel of eighteen, thinking she would be strong and useful. Strong she certainly was. Blanche said the strength of her looks even broke the things before she ever touched them; but useful she was not, though she had the best intentions. She had a wonderful faculty for keeping her face dirty; in vain Blanche insisted on the necessity of a neat and cleanly appearance in a maid who opened the door for visitors. Jane scrubbed her physiognomy till it shone again, but the inviolable smut would reappear as if by magic on her cheek, and the muslin aprons Mabel had made always looked as if they had been dusting the furniture. Then her cap was sure to fall off her head at the most critical moment, and she would leave the door open, and the visitor standing in the hall, while she searched for it and replaced it on her head very much awry. The visitor might look astonished, but what was that compared to hearing "Jane, where's your cap?" in Mabel's sweet reproachful voice. Her hair was as erratic as everything else about her, and seemed designed by Nature never to retain a hair-pin. She entertained the most unbounded respect for "the young ladies"—Miss Blanche being her especial

adoration—and would do anything in the world to please them, though why they should be so particular about things the importance of which she could not see was a perpetual puzzle to her. And in her eyes Mr. Seymour was simply perfect. Had she shown how frequently he anathematized her in private she might have had two opinions on the subject.

With the help of this Abigail Blanche Seymour undertook, one hot afternoon in June, to re-arrange the furniture in the drawing-room at Rutland Villa. The Seymours were all very musical, and the position of the piano was a constant source of annoyance to them, as the sound went into the wall. Blanche was anxious to move it to the other side of the room, but this necessitated a change in the disposition of all the furniture. However, she took advantage of her mother and Mabel going on a shopping expedition to try, with Jane's assistance, what could be done. The piano was an upright-grand, and much heavier than she expected; but being very eager and energetic, the pair succeeded in moving it half-way across the room. Their utmost efforts failed to get it an inch farther; whether from some inequality in the floor, or that their strength was exhausted, "it wouldn't move nohow," as Jane pathetically observed.

Altering the furniture and "upsetting the room" was one of Mrs. Seymour's aversions, and almost the only thing that really annoyed her; and Blanche began to get very nervous, fearing her return while everything was in such discomfort. A sudden peal at the bell startled both mistress and maid.

"Dear me, who can that be? How tiresome! Take off your dirty apron, Jane, and put your cap on (of course that ornament had fallen off), and say Mrs. and Miss Seymour are out."

Jane flew to the gate leading into the extremely limited garden, leaving her cap on the doorstep, and opened it to Horace Radclyffe. Now, she had only seen that gallant individual twice before, and both times had declared herself "struck all of a heap," by his gigantic stature and rare good looks. On this occasion she stared at him with open mouth, as if unable to comprehend his question, "Is Miss Seymour in?" On his repeating it, she felt for her cap, and missing it, looked hurriedly round, picked it up, and perching it on the extreme point of her fuzzy hair, opened the drawing-room door, intending to ask Blanche if she would admit him, for a certain feminine instinct told her

Mabel was not the Miss Seymour he wished to see. He naturally thought he was to follow, and heard himself thus announced: "Please, Miss Blanche, here be the tall gen'leman as comes after 'ee."

While Jane had been absent Blanche's thoughts flew back—she scarce knew why, for she had not been thinking of them before—to Deerscourt and the Radclyffes. Did Horace's presence near her, though she had not heard his voice, in some subtle and mysterious manner touch a chord of sympathy, and waft her back in thought to his home? Who knows what mystic current, occult, undefined, connects one human spirit with another? She had felt anxious and worried lately.

All remonstrance had proved vain, and Ralph and Mabel were bent on purchasing the Dye Works. The former was on the point of relinquishing his appointment, one that had been procured for him with great difficulty, and which, though the salary was not very large, was yet something certain. He was proposing that his mother should move into a larger house. She felt sure they were even now living beyond their means; her mother was growing every day more delicate, and she could see nothing but trouble before them. Her visit to Deerscourt seemed the brightest event in her life lately. Her thoughts went back to her Aunt Mary, to the Millars, to pretty Emily Peyton, to Leila, and last of all to Horace; and while she was thus thinking, leaning on the piano, resting her face on her folded arms, she heard Jane's announcement, and looking up saw him. He made his way through the disordered room to where she stood, blushing that bright, beautiful color of hers, at being found in such disarray. Her dress was fastened up into an impromptu *panier*, and she had on a large coarse white apron, which her mother used when she improved on the cook's puddings; yet she looked very charming as she advanced a step, and holding up both her small hands, rather dusty from what she had been doing, excused herself from taking his proffered one. "Colonel Radclyffe, I can't shake hands; mine are black."

"Not at all," said he, taking one in his. "I'm so glad to see you. Your servant seemed so uncertain, I was afraid you were out."

"I ought to be out, for I'm not fit to see any one. Jane ought not to have admitted you to such a room. Sit down, if I can find you a chair," and she pro-

ceeded to move some books off one, and then dusted it with her apron. "I must do as the women in the cottages do, and dust it before you can sit down," she said smiling.

"Won't you sit down yourself?" suggested he. "I will sit here."

"No, no; you must use the chair I've dusted for you."

"What are you doing?" he asked, looking round the room.

She explained. "But the piano is too much for us. Jane and I have been pushing till we are quite out of breath."

He smiled as a man always does at a woman's confession of her physical weakness. It is a superiority which no woman can deny him—that masculine strength of his. In many an intellectual conflict he may be defeated, and audacious woman questions his decisions and disputes his judgment. But his physical strength, his brute force, is unquestionably his own. She cannot gainsay it or attempt to cope with it. But then she has a perverse way of looking at it as a mere matter of course—as a something not owing to the man's merit, but bestowed by nature—an accident of his birth. When, therefore, she acknowledges her own weakness, it is a tacit appeal to his help and a tribute to his superiority which never fail to gratify his vanity.

"Can I be of any use? Where do you want it put?"

"Oh, I wouldn't trouble you for the world. Our cook is out now, but when she comes in we shall be able to manage it."

"I think, perhaps, I might do it as well as the cook. Do you despise my help?"

"By no means. I don't despise anything; but when you come to make a morning call, it's a curious way of receiving you to set you to work."

"Where is it to go?" he repeated; and proceeded to push it into the desired position. Blanche also pushing with all her small might, and contributing about as much assistance as a well-grown baby of a year old might have done. Then, still in her big apron, and with her dress tucked up, she sat down to try the effect, while Horace stood by looking at her. She declared herself satisfied, and raising her blushing face met his admiring look.

"Really you came as our good angel! We should never have done it alone, and it does put mamma out so to see the room upset. I cannot thank you enough."

"Well now, hadn't we better put the other things straight? Where's this table to go?"

She protested, but he insisted on helping her, and soon the room was in very decent order.

"Thank you again and again," began Blanche; but he stopped her.

"Pray don't say a word. I'm too happy to have been of use; and now, if you'll sit down and rest, I'll tell you why I came, beside the pleasure of seeing you."

Now that he was alone with her, he spoke in a tone of the most profound reverence and respect, as if she were too sacred to be addressed in the voice used to ordinary mortals, without any of the teasing manner he used to assume at Deerscourt. "There is to be a last performance of *Barbieri* to-night, and I have got you a box, if you will do me the honor to accept it."

"Oh, Colonel Radclyffe, how delightful! How very, very kind of you! Mabel and I were saying only this morning how much we should like to hear *Barbieri* again."

"Then you accept?" he said, looking with a smile at the radiant face.

"Certainly; only it's too kind of you. How came such a delightful idea into your head?"

He smiled. "If Ralph can't go with you, I shall be most happy to escort you."

"Thanks, many. Ralph does dine out; but it is such a long way for you to come, and our cooking is not of the most *recherché* order."

"I could not come to dine," he said, with a thoughtful delicacy Blanche fully appreciated, "but I would be here in time to take you."

"My only fear is that mamma will be tired. Of course if she is not up to it we cannot go."

"I suppose she wouldn't trust you to me?" he asked smiling. "I would take great care of you; and, you know, I'm a cousin, though you always will call me 'Colonel Radclyffe.'"

"Mamma wouldn't let us go without her, I'm sure," said Blanche, shaking her head, "but she will soon be in if you can wait."

"I'm not in the least hurry; I can wait as long as you please. I had a letter from Leila this morning, commanding me to come and hear all about you, and bring her the latest report."

"Are you going down to Deerscourt?"

"Yes, in a day or two, and then to

Wortham. Sir Henry Wentworth is very ailing, and the doctors order him to Wiesbaden, so I'm going abroad with them. I shall be able to help Alice."

"Poor girl! she must feel very anxious."

"Yes; it's a most unfortunate thing. She writes in low spirits. She hates traveling herself, but, of course, would do anything for him. Now tell me how you have been."

Insensibly she found herself drawn on to speak about her own anxieties respecting her mother and Ralph's projected schemes. He listened sympathizingly, and tried to reassure her.

"At all events you have given the best advice you could," he said consolingly, "and if your sister won't take it, that's not your fault."

Mrs. Seymour came in very tired, but would not hear of disappointing the young people, and Horace took his leave, promising to return for them at half-past seven. His visit had cheered Blanche wonderfully, and she and Mabel were in raptures at the idea of an opera, such expensive amusements being quite beyond them now.

There are certain events which stand out in the landscape of life flooded with perpetual sunshine, which no after-cloud can dim. They never recur to the memory without bringing a happy smile to the lip; and though the smile may be accompanied by a sigh for vanished hopes and broken idols, it is a sigh without bitterness, and one that does not make it a misery to think "I was happy then." This is so, in spite of Francesca's despairing cry, for she had passed the portal over which is inscribed—

"Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' intrate."

This visit to the opera with Horace Radclyffe was one of these happy reminiscences to Blanche Seymour. It was unexpected, and came at a time when she was low and anxious; and then there was the feeling, unconsciously entertained, "how kind it is of him!" He was a perfect escort, too; doing just what was necessary, and never intruding himself. Being really fond of music, he did not disturb them by ill-judged remarks and ignorant criticism.

Mario, surely the most fascinating of lovers, won not only Rosina's heart, but that of every lady present.

"He ought not to be at large," said Mabel, as the curtain fell after the singing scene. "It's positively dangerous. I never saw so delightful a man."

"Should you like to be wooed in that fashion, Miss Blanche?" asked Horace, in his softest voice, leaning over her.

"Only on Sundays, just by way of a treat," was the smiling answer; and looking up, she met his eyes and blushed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Dye Works, destined, according to Mr. Seymour, to supply a great want of the day, had been purchased, and were in full working order. He was assiduous in his attention to business; and though too much inclined to try experiments, there was no apparent reason why he should not realize the money he expected, provided he did not tire of the work, as he had of everything else. The translation from which so much had been hoped lay unsought for on the publisher's shelves; but Ralph assured his sister she should be no loser, as she should soon have both principal and interest from the proceeds of the Dye Works. On the strength of his success, he had recently persuaded his mother to remove to a house in Cadogan Place, necessitating, of course, more servants; and a brougham had just been added to the establishment, at Mabel's suggestion, as Mrs. Seymour was becoming every day less capable of enduring the fatigue of walking or the discomfort of a cab.

Mabel was supremely happy. She felt herself the restorer of the family fortunes, and was not tormented with those doubts as to her brother's capacities which haunted Blanche's mind.

"You see, Miss Cassandra," she said one day, playfully, "all your doleful prophecies are unfulfilled. Here are we in this nice house instead of that poky place at Kensington, and you must confess mamma is much better already for the daily drives, though you did protest so against the brougham."

"Now. Mabel, don't cry out that I'm sarcastic if I say of all this prosperity—*pourvu que ça dure*."

"But why shouldn't it *dure*?"

"Quickly come, quickly gone! It seems to me too sudden. It is barely two years since old Aunt Kate died; but then, as Ralph frequently reminds me, I don't understand business, so have no right to talk."

"But, dear, if Ralph says it's all right, and always has money and pays the bills, isn't that enough for your doubting mind?"

"Are all the bills paid, Mabel? I heard of a large one the other day being put off till Christmas."

"Well, and quite right, too. It was only just due; and as Ralph explained to mamma, it doesn't do to pay away everything at once, and leave himself without ready money."

"Then I think Ralph is wrong, but I know it's no use my saying anything about it."

"Not a bit, Bianca mia; and as a punishment for your gloomy prognostications, you shall come out driving in the brougham and sit with your back to the horses."

"Mr. Maynard called again yesterday, Mabel."

"Did he? I wish he'd betake himself to his country estate. He comes and sits here for hours, and bores one to death."

"Mabel, I wish——"

"If wishing were a body," Blanche, said Mabel laughing, "it might do some good to wish; as it is, it's time misspent. My dear, there's the carriage. Let us fly."

On their return from their drive they found Geoffrey Rivers extended full length on the drawing-room sofa awaiting them.

"Geof, you lazy fellow! why aren't you out this lovely afternoon?" exclaimed Blanche.

"Because, most fair, I've been out all the morning, have had no lunch, and am panting for some tea."

"You drink tea like any old woman! however, you shall have some promptly. Have you any news?"

"Not much; I've been in my parish all day, and have seen no one but Maynard."

"That man is ubiquitous!" exclaimed Mabel, coming into the room.

"How do you do, Geof? Where did you see Mr. Maynard? he was here for ages yesterday. He must be a district visitor, and think we are in his district, he comes so regularly."

"He inquired as much for you to-day as if he hadn't seen you for a month. He was calling on my mother when I got home. Now that I think of it, he seemed rather inclined to come with me when I informed him of my intention of calling here."

"I'm uncommonly glad he didn't!" exclaimed Mabel.

"Which of you is it?" he asked laughing.

"Oh, Mabel," said Blanche; "only she's so rude to him, it's quite shameful."

"I don't know what you call rude. I hardly ever speak to him."

"But is it really Mabel?" asked Geoffrey. "Because he always talks about you, Blanche."

"If you were to ask Jane, who is a very astute young woman, she would tell you he is 'Miss Seymour's gentleman.'"

Jane, be it observed, was promoted to be a sort of housemaid and attendant on the young ladies in the new establishment. Having less to do, she kept her face a little cleaner, but the power of retaining her cap was not yet given her. In fact, as her knowledge increased, she, like some others of her sex, her superiors in station, began seriously to call in question the justice of Custom—a custom which, in this instance, compelled her, a young woman rejoicing in a splendid head of curly, auburn hair, to bunch it up under a cap which would not stay on, while some respectable middle-aged lady, to whom that article would have been both useful and becoming, was allowed to go about with her sparsely-covered head exposed to public view. She consulted the cook on the subject, but the only answer she could draw from that functionary was that "she hadn't never knowd no 'ousemaid in a respectable fam'ly or otherwise as didn't wear a cap." She then appealed to Blanche, whose response, though differing in form, was much the same in substance. "She didn't know why, only housemaids always did wear caps. Not," she added, "that I see why they should. I never thought about it before, but it seems very senseless. I'll ask mamma about it, Jane."

But Mrs. Seymour could not be brought to see the matter in the light in which it presented itself to her daughter's mind, and looked on her ideas as very revolutionary. "Blanche, darling, you have such strange fancies! Of course Jane must wear a cap! All housemaids do."

"But, mamma, why should they?"

"Well, dear, it looks respectable, and they always do."

"Mamma, that's like old Ellen Gulliver, who would never go to the top of Wynchmore Hill because she never had been. The world would stand still if we all acted on that principle. If a thing is senseless in itself I don't see that its always having been done is a good reason for going on with it."

"Well, darling, I like my housemaids to wear caps; when you have a house you can allow yours to dispense with them."

Blanche was silenced, but remained unconvinced, and could only advise Jane to submit to the tyranny of Custom, or the remains of the sumptuary laws, as patiently as might be. This has been a digression.

"Well, Mabel," said Geoffrey, in reply to Blanche's last remark, "I recommend you to think of him. He's a thoroughly good fellow."

"And you are a thorough goose," replied the young lady, blushing. "Mr. Maynard is about the most stupid man I know. He sits like a stock, and never opens his lips."

"That's because his feelings overcome him in your presence, my dear. You should make allowance for a fellow a little."

"What's the good of feelings that don't show? no doubt he's clever, too, only he takes pains to conceal it."

"I think he is clever; he's very well read, too, and I should rather take his advice in a difficulty than that of any one I know."

"So long as you don't ask me to take it, I'm sure you're welcome to it."

"When is your friend Leila Radclyffe coming, Blanche?" asked Geoffrey.

"Next week. Poor Leila! I shall be so glad to see her. The change will do her good."

"What's the matter with her? I should have thought, now, that life was about as jolly a thing to her as you could meet on a summer's day."

"One would think it ought to be, certainly," said Blanche evasively.

"You liked your visit there, didn't you?" he said.

"I did. I like Uncle Charles and Aunt Mary immensely; though I must confess they are curiosities," she answered smiling.

"If you like Uncle Charles," said Mabel, "I should think it's more than his own family do. I wonder how his wife feels towards him?"

"Oh, I think she just likes him as her husband, you know," said Blanche reflectively.

Geoffrey burst out laughing. "What do you mean? how else should she like him?"

Blanche colored. "Don't you know that Rowena forgave De Bracy as a Christian?"

"And does he like her just as his wife?" inquired Mabel.

"Well, I think he's fond of her in his way. He misses her if she is long out of his sight, but that may be, perhaps, that he only feels the want of some one to bully. She's of use to him, too; and in a nature like his a faint tinge of gratitude is all one has a right to expect."

"It's something that he can feel that even," said Mabel.

"Even, Mabel? how do you make that out? Gratitude in some form or other is said to be the foundation of all real love."

"Oh no, Geoffrey. How can you call that real love which is grounded on a calculation, 'I owe so much love for so many favors received'? Love is a spontaneous growth."

"Surely you would not condemn a person for being grateful?"

"Not condemn, certainly; only, in a noble nature what you call gratitude becomes strong affection, and does not measure itself by the amount of kindness it has received."

"Still, Blanche, gratitude is at the bottom of the affection."

"No, Geof, I can't admit it. Gratitude must be an oppressive feeling. Animals are grateful; but in human beings, who are not clods, the sentiment gives place to a higher one."

"Well, for my part," said Mabel, "I think it would be a good thing if men felt even gratitude to their wives. Heaps of husbands like their wives because they are of use to them, and if they lose their health or anything, they cease to care for them. Look how savage a man always is, if his wife is ill."

"Mabel, you're worse than Leila! that's just the way she talks, as if all men were monsters."

"Why?" asked Geoffrey. "Has her experience been so unlucky?"

"Well, living with Uncle Charles doesn't give one an exalted idea of the sex that claims superiority, and she naturally judges all men by him."

"But there's your friend Horace?"

"She may think a degree less ill of him. For her father I doubt if she has a spark of affection."

"An amiable young lady!" exclaimed Geoffrey; "apparently certain old-fashioned injunctions about honoring her parents were omitted in her education."

"Geoffrey, that's all very fine; but I maintain that all duties are relative, and when a man makes himself obnoxious in

his family he has no right to expect 'honor and love and troops of friends.' He has thoroughly frozen Leila up; she reminds me of a sea anemone, the way she shrinks into herself the moment he comes into the room."

"I doubt there being much to freeze," said Geoffrey; "I'm sure she's a narrow, contracted nature."

"She isn't; she's a very nice girl, and only wants kindness and happiness to make her charming."

"We shall see you quite *épris* with her, Geoffrey," said Mabel; "and surprise you on your knees proposing to her."

"Not if I know it. To listen to you young ladies is a perfect warning against matrimony and very improving to a bachelor like myself. Conceive one's children closing up like sea anemones when one came into the room, and the being who vowed to love and honor one just tolerating one 'as her husband'!"

"Well, Geoffrey, it would be your own fault," said Blanche; "if you make the life of the being *you* vow to love and cherish a perpetual torment to her, you must take the consequences."

"Thank you, Blanche, for your lecture. I think I'll take Punch's advice to those about to marry."

"Don't be too sure of that. Remember Benedick!"

CHAPTER X.

ONE of the first things Mrs. Seymour proposed after their removal to Cadogan Place was that Leila Radclyffe should pay them a visit. Accordingly a week after the conversation recorded in the last chapter Horace brought her up to town.

The visit was eagerly anticipated by Mabel and Blanche, who hoped to be able to give Leila more happy views of life, and that in their cheerful circle she would expand into something like brightness and warmth. Ralph's and Geoffrey's curiosity to see the "Sea Anemone," as the latter persisted in calling her, was extreme; a young lady of nineteen, and very pretty, who looked on their sex with real aversion, being, Ralph observed, a new specimen in natural history. However, there was nothing very alarmingly inimical in her manner to either of them. She was simply coldly indifferent, though the ladies were amused at the abruptness with which she would break off any conversa-

tion she was carrying on the moment Ralph, whom she looked on as the master of the house, entered the room, as though he was not to be admitted to any intimacy of speech or intercourse.

A few days after her arrival Mr. Maynard called for one of his "interminable visits," as Mabel exclaimed when she heard his knock.

"Miss Seymour," said he, sitting down near her, "I heard you say the other day you would like to hear Disraeli speak. If you would wish to go on Monday, he is expected to make one of his grand displays, and I have sent in your names for places."

"Thanks. It's very kind of you. I did say I should like to hear him speak, but I don't think I said I should go to the House of Commons to hear him," replied Mabel, turning her beautiful face towards him, and throwing back her head with a movement peculiar to herself.

"But how else can you hear him?"

"Now, Mr. Maynard," she asked with the utmost gravity, "do I look like a wild beast?"

Never did human countenance exhibit more intense surprise and mystification than Mr. Maynard's at this totally unexpected query. The color mounted into his kindly, middle-aged visage, and he was at first utterly unable to muster words for a reply.

"A wild beast!" he at last ejaculated. "Why, bless my soul! what can you mean?"

"Just what I say. Surely you must take me for a wild beast, or you wouldn't seriously propose to me to shut myself up for hours in the caged, dark, stifling den which I hear the much-talked-of chivalry of British—gentlemen, I suppose I must call them—has provided for the accommodation of ladies in the House in which it is their own ambition to distinguish themselves."

This startling reception of a proposal he had hoped would have been received with pleasure, completely discomfited him. He glanced at the radiant, sunny face, and stammered, "I thought you would like it—I thought you wished it."

His pained look touched her, and she became grave at once.

"I feel how very kind it is of you, and, indeed, I'm obliged to you, but Mr. Maynard, I *have a back*."

He was growing more puzzled every instant. He was not a Scotchman, but he was slow at taking in a joke, and felt quite out of his depth with a young lady

who seemed to expect to inform him that the vote passed in such a unanimous manner in the House of Commons. He thought every one had a right.

"How you?" she questioned, interrogatively.

He was silent.

"I don't say you have not. I don't think you have; but I have, unfortunately, and it is better to say so than to say nothing."

Mr. Maynard gave it up in despair. He was not any longer interested in the subject of the House of Commons, and Miss Seymour's back and shoulders as they sat in the rough usage and looked in the same manner.

"Never did I see so angry," said Blanche, who could not help remarking.

"I'm quite serious, Blanche," Mr. Maynard said. "I don't think in the House of Commons it is a matter of consequence to see or hear women, but on the floor and your head down my opinion is that of a woman, or whatever the thing is called, that is put to prevent your taking a longer time than the right of the House."

"And then my word!" he exclaimed. "I don't know. I don't think you have to sit on the floor."

"Yes, I believe there are chairs, but if you sit on them you can't hear, and might as well be comfortable as honest; and honestly, the best speech man ever made wouldn't compensate me for the misery I should suffer, cramped up in such a position. My back objects to such usage, and would ache horribly."

Her meaning had at last dawned on her sister.

"Upon my word, it's too bad—too outrageous. I've often said it's a disgrace to the country."

"But why don't you alter it? you're in Parliament; why don't you move, as you call it, to have it made more fit for human beings?"

"Well, it has been spoken about several times, but it's always so hard to get anything done. Will you try the Speaker's Gallery? I believe that's more comfortable."

"No, Mr. Maynard. If you gentlemen of the House of Commons will provide a decent place for ladies to sit, I shall be most happy to go and hear you speak, but if I can only do so by submitting to be caged up like one of the beasts in the Zoological Gardens, why—I'd rather not."

Her winning manner took the sting out

of her refusal, but he looked as distressed and ashamed as if it were the guilt of the atrocious attentions of the House in question, and wondered her presence how much he disapproved of them.

"Will you let me avail myself of your kind offer?" asked Blanche.

"Certainly," turning courteously towards her. "Then you don't share your sister's opinion?"

"Most fully," she said. "She put it in a foolish place, but I won't be less foolish. Indeed my back will ache terribly—and my cousin wishes to hear how you make love."

"Blanche dear," said Mrs. Seymour, "I fear I should have the impression that sitting down makes my head ache so."

"Oh, mamma, if my Leila and my Leila would take us there, and we should be quite safe."

"I would take them up and deposit them securely," said Mr. Maynard.

"And Emily, oh please let us go," pleaded Leila.

Of course Mrs. Seymour consented, and there was a silence of a few minutes, broken by Mr. Maynard sitting with uncomfortable gravity. "I felt rather puzzled when you asked me if I took you for a wild beast. I don't quite see what you mean at first."

"Do you now?" she asked with equal gravity, her eyes twinkling.

"Yes; and about the 'rough usage' too," and he laughed till his whole face became radiant. "You don't seem much fit for rough usage," and he looked at her slight figure.

"Mabel," said her mother when he had taken his leave, "how you do mystify and puzzle that poor man!"

"Mamma, he's so dense."

"He's got some fun in him for all that," said Blanche.

"If he has, then, it's like his feelings, so deep down, that for all ordinary purposes he might as well not have it."

CHAPTER XL

On the following Monday Ralph took Blanche and Leila to the House of Commons. They were late—Ralph Seymour was never known to be in time—and they found two ladies already in the Gallery.

Mr. Maynard was assiduous in making them *au fait* of all that was going on: Blanche could not but be sorry for his disappointment about Mabel, though all he said was, "Your sister did not change her mind, then."

In the course of the evening a gentleman came in and sat down behind the elder of the two ladies before mentioned.

"How are you getting on?" he asked. "What do you think of it all?"

Leila started at the voice. She was sitting on the floor, and such light as there was fell full on her face. She hastily pulled down her veil, and withdrew as much as possible into the shadow.

"Blanche," she whispered, "that's Sir George Conway. Sit forward. I don't want him to see me."

But he had already recognized her, and came round to her. "Surely I can't be mistaken in Miss Radclyffe," said he, stooping to shake hands. "I'm indeed glad to see you. I did not know you were in town, or I should have done myself the honor of calling on Mrs. Radclyffe."

"Mamma is not in town," replied Leila, feeling inexpressibly annoyed at the encounter. "I am only up for a short visit to my aunt."

"Do you prefer sitting on the floor?" he asked smiling.

"Not if I could hear otherwise. This is my cousin, Miss Seymour," she added, seeing him glance at that young lady. "My aunt was too tired to come, so allowed us, as a favor, to come without her."

"Can I be of any use in seeing you to your carriage?" he asked eagerly.

"No, thank you. My cousin, Mr. Seymour, is coming for us presently."

His brow contracted. "May I introduce my aunt and sister to you?" and Leila, with a burning face, bowed to the two as he went through the usual formula.

"I have been admiring you all the time you have been here," said Miss Conway with blunt frankness; "but had I known who you were how much more interested I should have been!"

Leila's chief sensation was a wish that the earth would open and swallow her up.

"Where are you staying?" proceeded Miss Conway.

"With my cousin, Mrs. Seymour."

"Yes; but where does she live, I mean? may I come and see you? when are you at home?"

Leila muttered something about "very happy," and Blanche came to her rescue

by an unfounded statement that she was missing a humorous speech from Mr. Gladstone.

Presently Sir George took his leave, and when Mr. Maynard came in again Leila pleaded urgently that they might go.

"Your address, please, Miss Radclyffe?" said Miss Conway, who was not to be baffled, and Leila had no alternative but to give it.

No allusion was made to Sir George's appearance till Leila was safe in her own room. "Oh, Blanche, how unfortunate!" she then exclaimed. "What shall I do?"

"Do, my dear? why, nothing. He can't run away with you."

"But, Blanche, I do feel so frightened! and that irrepressible sister! she told me she had been admiring me all the time, and would have been so much more interested had she known who I was, so, of course, he has told her all. And she would insist on having your address."

"Well, dear, she will probably call once, and there will be an end of it."

"If I could think so! I dread mamma's knowing it, and wanting me to have him. Whenever anything goes wrong now she always says, 'If you would but have accepted that charming Sir George!' and Horace, too, says I was so foolish to refuse him."

"But you can't accept the man unless he asks you again, and you've no reason to suppose he will just because you have seen him once."

"Yes, Blanche, I *feel* he will. Don't you know when you *feel* a thing and dread it?" and the same look of horror came over the girl's face as on that day at Deerscourt when she had spoken on the same subject.

"Well, dear," said Blanche soothingly, "then you must refuse him, that's all. I'm sure when he sees you mean it he won't persevere."

"Do you think not?" and she looked earnestly at her, as if to read her very soul. "I'm so afraid he's angry at having been refused, and goes on that he may have his revenge afterwards."

"A man must be very bad, Leila, to do such a wicked thing as that. How miserable he would be himself! I'm sure from Sir George's face *he* wouldn't, at any rate. I thought him charming. You never told me he was so good-looking."

"I never thought about him except to hope I might never see him again."

"I didn't know he was in Parliament," said Blanche after a pause.

"Yes; he's member for some place in Ireland, or Timbuctoo, or somewhere."

"How came you never to see his sister before?"

"Because she always lives with his aunt in Devonshire. He's very fond of her, I believe. When his mother died he broke up his establishment at Leighton Court, and now there's no one there but the housekeeper, I fancy."

"And, my dear, he wants a mistress for the said Leighton Court, and thinks you would make a charming Lady Conway, and so do I," said Blanche, laughing and kissing her.

"Blanche, don't jest. I can't bear it. I wish there were Protestant nunneries, so that one might escape all the misery of people wanting one to marry."

Leila went to bed, but tried in vain to sleep. A real genuine terror took possession of her mind that she would be forced to become Sir George's wife, and if not his, some one else's—that she should not be able to resist her mother's repeated reproaches and entreaties, backed up as she would be by Horace. The possibility that she should ever like any one well enough to wish herself to marry him never for a moment entered her head, and there was not a spark of gratified vanity or satisfaction that Sir George, after an interval of nearly two years, was still unchanged in his feelings towards her. She attributed it solely to a determination not to be baffled in what he had set his heart on. She did not believe a man capable of true and unselfish affection, and thought with horror of a remark Horace had made to her respecting Alice Wentworth's postponement of their marriage, "Well, she has her way now, but my turn will come some day, and then——" and she shuddered as she recalled the look that accompanied the words. With the vivid reality which darkness and silence give, her mother's life, such as she had known it, passed before her—a life of perpetual restraint even when her father was in what might be termed an amiable mood—of heart-sickening fears, necessitating miserable subterfuges and endless prevarications, of cruel words and insults heaped on the helpless victim, to which she had listened with feelings of maddening indignation and impotent despair. She felt again the burning tears that fell on her face from her mother's eyes as, after an awful scene which, though she was only ten years old at the time, was indelibly impressed on her memory, she clasped her in her arms,

exclaiming passionately, "My darling, my darling! if I could only have you, I would go away, and he should never see me again." She could not stay in bed; and, rising, plunged her head into the bath of cold water that stood prepared for morning use, to try and banish the horrible visions;—not that they were anything new to her—her nightly meditations were too often only reproductions of the scenes of the day; but the dread of being forced into marriage clothed them with a fresh terror. She was naturally timid, and whatever nerve she had ever had had been completely destroyed. She was not a selfish girl, yet hers was not a thoroughly unselfish nature. Timidity and unselfishness never are combined; and true and deep as was her affection for her mother, she could not set herself, and her fear of a like fate, completely aside. Blanche Seymour would have married the man, under the circumstances, feeling that she would thereby contribute to her mother's happiness, utterly regardless of the consequences to herself, but Leila could not do so. Her heart and brain capacities were infinitely smaller than those of her friend, and the power of complete self-sacrifice is only given to very large natures—in this as in other things, much seeming to be required from those to whom much is given.

Having bathed her head, she knelt down and prayed for herself and her mother with the earnestness of which only a young heart is capable. As a rule she mentioned her father in her petitions, but now she did not attempt to do so,—even for her mother her prayer was little more than a despairing, dumb cry for *some* help—what, she could not define, for the only prospect of real relief was one that, great as was her misery, she could not think of.

She rose from her knees more composed, and towards morning slept, but she bore plainly enough the traces of her night vigil when she went down to breakfast; and though she attributed her paleness to a violent headache, Mabel and Blanche divined the real cause, little as they could enter into her feelings.

"Politics don't agree with you, Leila," said Ralph. "You look as pale as a ghost this morning. Would you like a walk? I can spare an hour if you young ladies feel inclined for the Row."

Ralph had been very kind to Leila; he pitied her, she looked so depressed and unlike what a girl ought to be; and his own sisters were so bright and cheerful,

even during their poverty, that the contrast struck him the more.

It was a lovely day, and the air and exercise were beginning to restore Leila's color, when, as they were walking down Rotten Row, they came full on Sir George Conway, his sister, and his aunt, Lady Eveleigh. There was no avoiding them, and the gentleman's pleasure on seeing Leila was so great that Blanche wondered how she could fail to be touched by it. He was a handsome man with a general air of sunshine about him—his eyes blue—his hair and moustache golden brown. Every line of his face bespoke goodness and kindness of heart. He walked beside Leila, and talked to her of her mother and home—of everything he thought would interest her, but she was so afraid of offering him any encouragement that she would hardly answer him. Her motive was so evident that he could not but see it, and became silent, continuing, however, to walk beside her, glancing from time to time uneasily at Ralph, who was in front with Lady Eveleigh.

Edythe Conway literally took possession of Blanche. She was not nearly as handsome as her brother, but a pleasant, sensible-looking girl, very fair; and though her manner was abrupt, there was nothing fast or *slangy* about her.

"It is so lucky meeting you," she began at once. "I have always wanted to see Leila Radclyffe. I suppose you know George proposed to her? He is devoted to her, and would give anything if she would have him. Did she tell you?"

Blanche acknowledged she had heard it.

"And do you think there is any chance of her ever getting to like him?"

"Miss Conway, it is a subject on which I really have no right to speak."

"No, of course not. I ought not to have asked you. Only I am so sorry for poor George. He and I are alone in the world, except my aunt, and it is so lonely and dull for him at Leighton Court; but he says he ought to live there. I can't stay there because my chest is weak. though I look so strong, and I have to live always either in Devonshire or abroad; besides, even if I could, it's not like having a wife, is it?"

Blanche confessed that wife and sister were not synonymous terms.

"And he is so fond of Leila. Always since she was a child he has admired her; he used to say she was like a little fairy, she was so graceful. He was perpetually telling me about her. Once I was quite

jealous; but that was before I knew that he must, one day, like some one better than me. If Leila could only be made to like him! you don't know how good he is! the kind things he does! and he is never cross."

"I'm quite sure he is all you say. He looks it."

"Doesn't he?" said his sister enthusiastically. "If he thinks any one is unhappy he's quite miserable. I think one reason he is so fond of Leila is that he fancies she is not quite happy at home,—only you must not tell her so for the world,—and he says he is sure he could make her life pleasanter to her. Don't you think he could?"

"You see," said Blanche, who could hardly help laughing at the girl's vehemence, "it's not what we think, but what Leila thinks."

"Yes, I suppose so," she said, sighing. "How glad I should be to have any one who would like me for myself as George does Leila, but I never shall."

"Why not?"

"Because people think I shall have all my aunt's money, and she is very rich, so I shall only be liked on that account."

"That's a dismal prospect, Miss Conway."

"Well, so it is, in one way; but George says if I am liked for my money at first, I shall be liked for myself afterwards, perhaps."

"I'm sure you will," said Blanche kindly, looking at the eager face, lit up with warm affection and enthusiasm for her brother.

The brother having walked down the Row and up again in almost perfect silence, said suddenly, "I'm afraid you are not well, Miss Radclyffe; you look very pale and delicate."

"We were late last night, and I felt tired this morning, that's all."

"I was so glad to see you," he observed in a deprecating sort of way, as if apologizing for the feeling; "it was such a totally unexpected pleasure, and Edythe was delighted. She has been long wanting to make your acquaintance."

"I hope she is stronger than she used to be," returned Leila, fully resolved not to express any gratification at the introduction.

"Yes, she is. I hope she may venture to come to Leighton for the summer months next year; perhaps even this next August."

"That will be very nice for you." And then Mabel, who considered that they had

stayed long enough with the Conways to avoid giving Ralph any idea how unwelcome their society was, proposed going home.

"Well, George," said Miss Conway, "I hope you had a satisfactory talk to Leila?"

He smiled a little. "She would hardly speak to me. I'm afraid it's no go, Edythe."

"Nonsense, dear; I'll call there tomorrow and ask them to join our party to Richmond, and then you will see more of her. The fact is, George, she hardly knows you yet."

"No use, Edythe; no use," he said sadly. "I won't tease her about it."

CHAPTER XII.

LEILA left the Row feeling that the Fates were against her.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends," was Blanche's whispered comment to Mabel.

Ralph rallied Leila a little in his grandiloquent way about Sir George, but more from the idea that it was the style of conversation pleasing to a girl, than as having any real meaning. She could not bear teasing on the subject, and was so distressed that he forbore at once, looking much surprised.

"Is there anything in it, Blanche?" he asked. "I was only chaffing her."

"Nothing; only she's not accustomed to that style of thing. The Aborigines don't practice the art of chaffing."

Leila's impulse was to return home at once, but the knowledge of the voluble surprise and torrent of regrets Mrs. Radclyffe would pour forth if she did restrained her.

"What am I to do, Blanche? if I go home, mamma will go on so; and if I stay in London, am I never to go out without meeting those dreadful people?"

"Come, you've only met them twice, Leila; and as he will be going down to Leighton Court, you may meet him at Deerscourt."

"Not likely: he hardly ever calls. Papa hates him. His great-great-grandfather was, I forget what; besides, they quarreled about hunting, or shooting, or something. Sir George's foxes ate papa's pheasants' eggs, or did something foxes ought not to do."

On their return they found Geoffrey

Rivers with Mrs. Seymour, to Blanche's joy, as Leila would always brighten into animation in discussing with him the peculiarities of Mr. Millar's doctrine and practice.

Had any one accused Geoffrey of illiberality in his opinions, he would have repudiated the charge vehemently; but, truth to tell, he was anything but charitably disposed towards the school of theology to which Mr. Millar belonged.

"How is the poor little governess Blanche told us about?" asked Mabel, after the whole Millar family had been thoroughly dissected for the twentieth time.

"She gets to look more sad and miserable every day. The children bully her, I think, as well as Mrs. Millar."

"Do you go on having the German lessons?"

"Yes; I go there twice a week. I hate it, but mamma wishes it, and poor Miss Peyton is always delighted to see me."

"The only kind face the poor child ever meets, I suppose," said Mabel.

"It's not for myself," said Leila laughing; it's because I tell her about Blanche. She has the most passionate admiration and worship for her, and devours every scrap of news she can hear of her. You've no idea of her delight, dear, when she heard you were coming to Deerscourt; her only fear is that her holidays may come at the same time."

"Oh, then they give her holidays?" said Geoffrey.

"Yes; she was away a fortnight at Christmas."

"Only a fortnight? what a shame!"

"Geoffrey," exclaimed Ralph, "if you and Blanche are going to descant on the woes of governesses in general, and this one in particular, I'll make tracks! There's no stopping them," he added, turning to Leila, "if they once begin."

"Ralph confessed, however, that it made him ill to hear about Miss Peyton," said Blanche.

"So it does; therefore I say, don't let us talk about it at lunch. It does her no good and makes us miserable."

"Then you do think it a shame?" inquired Leila, looking at him.

"Monstrous! the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ought to interfere. It's shameful in any case, but more especially when the girl is pretty, as Blanche says she is."

"My dear," said Mrs. Seymour, "she would feel just the same if she were ugly."

"No doubt, mother; only I feel more for her as she is pretty," and he turned to Leila with a smile that showed all his white teeth. "Beauty in distress, you know, is doubly touching."

"I wonder if she has got the piano yet for her lame brother, poor child?" said Mrs. Seymour.

"I wish I could get her one," sighed Blanche.

"Now, Blanche, there's what I always say is so silly in you," exclaimed Ralph impatiently. "You are forever wanting to take other people's burdens on your own shoulders. Why on earth should you want to give Miss Thing's brother a piano?"

"Don't be alarmed, Ralph; I'm not going to ask you for the money to buy it."

"No, Blanche; but why make yourself a female Don Quixote, going about to redress grievances, often imaginary?"

"This is not an imaginary one, at all events," said Geoffrey, always ready to stand up for his favorite.

"No; but it's one that Blanche can't remedy; and what I complain of is, that her blood is always at boiling-point over some fancied injustice she has found out, and which she thinks it is her mission to remedy."

"I don't think it my mission, Ralph; but when I see oppression and wrong, I can't help feeling indignant."

"But your ideas of wrong and oppression would upset the world. You think it a social injustice for the housemaids to wear caps."

"*Fiat justitia*, etc.," quoted Blanche, as if to herself. "I suppose that is out of fashion now, though. I don't think it a social injustice for the housemaids to wear caps, only a very senseless custom, and the world would not fare a bit the worse if it were left off."

"Hear, hear," said Geoffrey. "I highly approve of Blanche's independent line of thought."

"What a discussion poor Miss Peyton has led to," said Mrs. Seymour, who always dreaded these skirmishes between Ralph and Blanche. He had never quite forgiven her opposition to his application of Mabel's money, and he generally had it in his mind when he inveighed against her Don Quixotism.

"Is any one coming for a drive with me?" she continued, to put an end to the conversation.

Leila, fearing a visit from Miss Conway, eagerly volunteered, and Blanche accompanied them.

On their return they found Mabel looking flushed and tired.

"My darling," said her mother, "are you not well? your face is burning."

"I'm quite well, mamma; but—Mr. Maynard has been here," and she looked up at her, as she stood by her chair, with a half-shy, half-humorous expression in her sunny blue eyes. She proceeded to relate that he had called shortly after they went out, and had made her an offer of his hand, "which I took the liberty of declining, mamma."

Mrs. Seymour kissed her and smoothed her hair. "Well, dear, if you don't like him, it can't be helped."

Blanche threw her arms round her neck. "Oh, you poor Mabel! how dreadfully disagreeable it must have been! no wonder you look crimson; but tell me what he said. As nobody asks me to marry him, I have to depend on you and Leila for accounts of what men say on those interesting occasions. What did he say?"

"Oh, the regulation thing. He was very blundering and confused, but I contrived to get at his meaning."

"Mabel dear," said Mrs. Seymour, "I hope you were not flippant in your refusal. Believe me, my child, the honest love of a good man is not to be lightly rejected."

"Mamma, I was not flippant. I was very nice to him. Too nice, in fact, for he said——" She stopped, and her color deepened.

"Well, Mabel," said Blanche, "go on. Don't stop in the most interesting place."

Leila stood up, to leave the room.

"Don't go, Leila; I don't mind your hearing. He only said that the good feeling and consideration I showed in my refusal added ten-fold to the disappointment he felt. I said I hoped he didn't think I had done anything to encourage him."

"And what did he say?"

"He said 'No, he couldn't say I had been very encouraging, still he had hoped, etc., and would wait as long as I liked.' So you see, mamma, I wasn't flippant."

"Did he stay long?"

"Not very; he said he ought to apologize for calling so early, but he didn't know how to do so, as it gave him the opportunity of seeing me alone."

"Did he look sorry?" inquired Leila solemnly.

"Well, I suppose he did, rather, but he'll get over it; and now I've told you all, do let us have some tea."

The sisters, however, as was natural, talked the matter over when they were going to bed.

"Do you know, Mabel, though, of course, you are quite right, I'm sorry you have refused him? He is really fond of you, and mamma likes him. I always thought you did him injustice."

"Not really, Blanche, ever; and I was sorry for him to-day, but, you see, Ralph does hate him so."

"I have no patience with Ralph. He has no more knowledge of character than a deal table; and if that was your only reason, I think you are wrong."

"It wasn't my only reason, certainly, but it has always made me careful not to get to like him. I should be miserable if I was married to a man who hated my only brother."

"Mr. Maynard doesn't hate Ralph."

"He doesn't show his dislike now, but he can't like him: and after a time there would be sure to be quarrels. As Leila says, men are all very well till you are married to them."

"Mabel, for pity's sake, don't take up Leila's ideas. I think they are horrid, though there is great excuse for her, poor thing! We cannot all be always just what we are in society."

"No; but, Blanche, there's that money, you know. He might think he had a right to it, and how could I ask Ralph to pay it back all at once? I suppose if you marry, your husband gets your money?"

"I should like to give all I had to any one I cared for, but I suppose there would be settlements. Mamma had money which papa's creditors could not touch."

"Well, at any rate, dear, considering all the complications it would have given rise to, I was right in what I did. Ralph and Mr. Maynard can't both have the money."

"Provided you don't regret it yourself, that's all."

This was the only intimation Mabel had ever given that she had any doubt as to the success of Ralph's schemes. She did not repent of what she had done, certainly, but she felt, even though to Blanche she would not confess it, that the cessation of her sober lover's visits made a blank in her existence.

Ralph thought proper to be extremely angry at Mr. Maynard's presumption, or "bumptiousness," as he called it, though how it had been manifested no one but himself could see. "It was just like

him," he said, "to take advantage of mother's absence to force himself on Mabel." But he was deprived of this grievance by a letter from Mr. Maynard to Mrs. Seymour, apologizing for having spoken to her daughter without first naming the matter to her, and expressing the high regard and esteem he felt for Mabel.

"Blanche," said Leila, "I hope you won't think me very selfish, if I tell you that in one way I am glad Mabel is not going to marry Mr. Maynard, as now mamma will see that I am not the only girl who doesn't want to be married."

"Yes; only Mabel would not like it talked about. It's not fair to a man to mention such a thing."

"But I may tell mamma when I go home, mayn't I?"

"Well, I suppose, just Aunt Mary, but no one else."

"How happy you three are, and how thankful you ought to be to have a mother like Aunt Fanny! She never said one word to Mabel, and wasn't the least astonished, and won't go on at her for weeks about it. I wonder why mamma wants to get rid of me?"

The next afternoon Lady Eveleigh and Miss Conway called, urgent for the Seymours and Leila to join their party to Richmond. Mrs. Seymour excused herself on the ground of health, and declined to allow her young ladies to go without her or their brother, and he was engaged; so in spite of Edythe's pressing entreaties, the invitation was refused.

Notwithstanding her dread of meeting the Conways, this visit to London was the happiest period of Leila's girlhood. Geoffrey was always ready to go out with them, and was an excellent *cicerone*.

Mrs. Seymour was indulgent to a fault in the matter of hours, and Ralph prodigal of opera-boxes and stalls at the theatre. He was not generous as a rule, but he liked Leila, and was willing to do anything to please her. Blanche did not venture to remonstrate, but her heart sank as she wondered where the money came from, and how there was such a quick return for that which had been laid out. Ralph showed such tenacious jealousy of any inquiry, especially from her, and so constantly said that all was going on well, that she could only hope her fears were vain.

They saw the Conways twice at the opera, but beyond a few words in the crush-room, there had been no communication.

The sunshiny seasons of our lives, like the stormy or dreary ones, come to an end, though during the latter Time's chariot, often enough, seems to drive heavily or even to run on broken wheels, while during the former it bears us along so rapidly and smoothly that we are no more conscious of its progress than we are of our motion with the earth in its diurnal course.

Mrs. Seymour's doctor strongly advised sea air for her, as she had suffered so from the heat of London, and it was settled that she and Mabel should go to Bognor, and Blanche and Leila to Deerscourt.

When Mrs. Radclyffe's urgent invitation to the former had been accepted, the time had seemed so far off, that neither she nor her mother nor sister had realized how much they should dislike the parting. Now, it was with great reluctance they could make up their minds to it. Saving that one visit to Deerscourt, Blanche had never been away from her home, and she and Mabel each felt as if her dearer and better part were gone when they were separated. They were so completely all in all to each other that the idea of any other friendship had never occurred to them. Some childish quarrels they may have had, but there had never been a moment's bitterness, scarcely even an hour's coolness, between them. Blanche was the stronger character of the two; and naturally, though unconsciously, assumed the lead, but there was that nobility of affection between them, that no cloud of jealousy had ever darkened their intercourse, and no personal praise or admiration afforded the other half the pleasure she experienced on hearing a eulogium passed on the sister she so dearly loved. To them "having no sister" was the greatest of misfortunes, and Leila's chief claim on their sympathy was that she was deprived of this natural help and companion. Surely of all the sacred affections of life, there is none holier, more potent, or more durable than this mighty band which unites two sisters near of an age and brought up together. It is a thing apart—compatible with and subsisting beside that other overmastering love which comes inevitably to every woman at some period of her existence, and though for a time the new feeling may seem to overshadow the old, it is only *seeming*. (Nothing can really break that "magic" * concord which took its rise in the sources of life itself, is bound up

with the hallowed recollections of childhood, with joys and sorrows shared as far back as memory can reach, with religious impressions received from the same mother's lips, those impressions taking their hues from the baby-individuality of each mind, those hues, again, so blended together by constant association as to become part of the being of each.)

Independently of the dislike the sisters felt to being separated, they had an additional source of anxiety in the state of their mother's health. The night before they were to part both were conscious of a depression they could not shake off. After they had been some time in bed, Mabel whispered softly, "Blanche, are you asleep?"

"No, dear, but I hoped you were, so did not speak."

"I can't sleep. I feel a horrible *presentiment* that some misfortune is going to happen. I wish you were not going to Deerscourt."

"So do I. I have just the same feeling, and can't get rid of it. I wonder why such vague fears come, and what they mean?"

"To warn us, I suppose, against some coming evil."

"There can be no evil at Deerscourt," said Blanche, with a slight shiver she could not repress.

"Blanche, I don't much like Aunt Mary. She is asking you down there, not out of kindness to you, but to suit herself, and she will keep you there for months, in spite of mamma's letters."

"I won't stay, simply. Mamma is not well, and I'll come home the moment you return from Bognor."

"I wish I didn't feel so uncomfortable about your going," said Mabel, sitting up in bed. "I feel as if it were to bring some great misery. It makes me quite cold and shivery."

Blanche shuddered again, and was silent for a few minutes; then she said, "Mabel dear, the feeling must be only nonsense, and because we are going to be away from each other, and I from mamma. What harm can there be in my going there?"

After a long pause, Mabel said, "Do you remember the vision Eliphaz the Temanite saw when 'fear came on him, and trembling, which made all his bones to shake'?"

"I do. I was thinking of it before you spoke to me."

"How awful it must have been when that spirit passed before his face! I should

* "Nor time, nor wrath of deadliest mood, that magic may o'erpower."—*Christian Year*.

think it felt like a sudden gust of cold wind; but an undefined, vague fear one can't account for, is worse."

"Darkness brings fear very often—it is mysterious. It was in 'the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on man,' that Eliphaz felt the spirit. In broad daylight one does not have such fears."

"I hope broad daylight will drive away the haunting terror I have of your going to Deerscourt."

"Lie down, Mabel," said Blanche, after another long pause; "you are stone cold this hot night. Lie down, dear," and then after a time they dropped asleep, to wake with that heavy, unconscious consciousness of coming pain, known only to really loving, affectionate hearts. Some people part, and meet, and part again as a natural routine of their existence, while to others each parting, though it be only temporary, is an event the present pain of which is so great, that they cannot look beyond it to the expected reunion.

CHAPTER XIII.

RALPH and Mabel accompanied them to the station and gave them up into Horace Radclyffe's charge. Blanche's heart was so full that she could not restrain a few tears, much as she tried, when she saw the last of Mabel. Horace, to whom the idea of crying at leaving home for a month was as new as it was incomprehensible, looked on in amazement.

"Didn't she want to come?" he asked, afterwards.

"Yes; only she was sorry to leave Mabel."

"But she'll see her again in no time."

"The Seymours are not like us," said Leila; "they never quarrel or have scenes, and Mabel and Blanche seem to hate being away from each other."

"What stuff!" would have been his comment had it been any one but Blanche. Of her, even in his own mind, he could not think otherwise than with respect, but the incident increased the curiosity with which he regarded her. She was an enigma to him. He knew her to be clever and sensible, yet she cried at leaving her sister for a month!

Horace Radclyffe was one of those individuals of the male species to whose

mind the idea of what an advantage it is to be a man is constantly present. The law of compensation was unknown to him, and the notion that our destinies are tolerably evenly meted out to us, in the matter of sex as in all else, was one which his understanding could never have grasped. That there were certain pleasures and liberties from which sex alone debarred people, made it an ever-present source of rejoicing to him that he did not belong to that sex. That women being "diverse," and having totally different tastes and feelings, viewed things in a different light,—that they had compensatory advantages and pleasures of their own,—was an explanation he could never accept, any more than he could ever believe that a woman was to be found who congratulated herself that she was a woman, not a man. Not that he had any contempt for women—his feeling was one of pity. He considered them a necessary and useful part of creation. Useful, especially. Till he could induce Alice Wentworth to marry him he could not have got on without his mother. He was warmly attached to his sister, but he took little or no pleasure in the society of ladies, as such. He was not cultivated enough to derive refreshment or amusement from the contrast which a woman's mind presents to a man's. One woman was pretty much the same to him as another; yet he was especially open to feminine influence, which sounds contradictory; but such was the case. He was fond of Alice Wentworth as he would have been of any girl to whom he had engaged himself. The connection was unexceptionable. She had money: he could not have married her otherwise; she suited him, and he would make her a good husband, so long as she wanted neither intellectual companionship nor sympathy. As time went on, and her father's health prevented their marriage, he sometimes felt misgivings about her "temper," which was the term he applied to any want of pliability she showed; but then he was so sure of his own power of being master once they were married, that he would not let such considerations interfere with an otherwise advantageous match.

Blanche Seymour was altogether a new experience in his life. She puzzled as much as she attracted him. It was absurd, somehow, to think of such a girl with pity. She did not seem the least conscious that it was a misfortune to be a

woman ; on the contrary, she looked and acted as if she were as much mistress of the earth she trod as he was master. It was plain that no idea of inferiority had ever entered her head. She took the politeness and deference she invariably received from men as a natural homage due to her. Their physical strength was to be used in her service, if she needed it ; though she did not often appeal to it, for she was too independent to demand or care for *petits soins*,—but her moral strength, which she considered, though without being aware of it, much greater than theirs, was to be used to protect them as much as possible from their natural infirmities. Her theory, had she put it into words, was that a woman is to a man as a conscience ; but she did not put it into words, nor even had she any clear idea that such was her feeling. It was too much part of herself for her to be conscious of it. That such a woman should have immense influence over such a man as Horace was as inevitable, if they were thrown together, as it was impossible that he could ever thoroughly understand her, or discriminate the finer shades of her character, but there was a simplicity about him which enabled him to appreciate her more, perhaps, than a more complex or cultivated nature might have done. In truth, this simplicity of his it was which made him so charming as a companion, especially to Blanche. He talked to her without subjecting her to mental dissection, a practice to which some men are addicted, though there is nothing a woman resents so highly.

Mr. Radclyffe received her with boisterous cordiality, and Mrs. Radclyffe quite overwhelmed her with the exuberance of her delight. The day following her arrival she found, after lunch, a riding-habit and whip on her bed, as if put ready for use. She flew to Leila for an explanation, and learned that it was Horace's gift, and had been made for her by his orders.

"But how could they make it fit?" she asked, laughing and blushing.

"Perhaps it mayn't fit after all. Do you remember the day we all measured our waists and shoulders to see which was biggest? I did it to find out your size for Horace. He said you were so beautifully proportioned, that that would be guide enough."

"Well, it really is kind of him."

"He has been so excited about it ; now, do try it on. He is so anxious to know if it fits."

"But, Leila, I don't like taking such a present. It's very good of him, only——"

"My dear, you must take it now it's made, and you must ride with him. You see I can't, and he has so set his heart on having you."

The habit fitted to perfection, and as Horace's whistle was just then heard in Leila's boudoir, she insisted on Blanche going out to show it to him. He had been wandering about restlessly, waiting for the discovery of his present. What could she do but blush and smile, and thank him, promising to ride the next morning?

"He had had the horse exercised with a side-saddle, etc., for her, so she need not be the least afraid."

She assured him she felt no alarm, and they started for their first ride together, to his unbounded delight, and hers too, for she was passionately fond of the exercise, though she had given up all thoughts of it since their change of fortune, as a pleasure quite beyond her reach. She was utterly fearless, and rode beautifully ; and the country being lovely, these excursions on horseback in the early morning before the sun got too high, or more generally in the late afternoon, became the supreme events in her day. As was to be expected, they became very intimate. Horace would tell her his military experiences in a simple, unaffected way, and relate stories of his barrack life with infinite fun and drollery. And before long she knew all the history of his own life ; his courtship of Alice Wentworth, his feelings about her, of which he spoke quite freely, his hopes and fears for the future, all were poured out to her, and she listened with ever-ready sympathy and unfailing interest. Her letters to Mabel became dangerously full of Horace—his sayings and doings.

"He has much more in him than I thought at first, and takes very right views of men and things," was the verdict pronounced in reply to some inquiry about him.

It is the danger of such characters as Blanche's that they idealize all who come within their reach, especially where their feelings are concerned, and this not so much from want of judgment as because they really have a power of bringing out whatever there is of good and noble in those about them, so that they see only the best side of them, and cannot conceive of ignoble motives and actions foreign to their own nature. They view others through a *glamour* cast by their own individuality. This was particularly

so with Blanche and Horace. The power a woman has to elevate or lower a man's character is untold. She cannot change it or eradicate its inherent defects or virtues, but she can and does modify it to an enormous extent. And Blanche had a distinctly elevating influence over Horace. When in her society he felt in some vague way that perhaps a man might have a higher ambition than simply to get all the material pleasure he could out of life. "A primrose by a river's brim" would always be a primrose to him, but it was something to have learned that it could be something more to another; and as he rode with his bright companion under the arching trees of the park or across the downs over the short springy turf in the rich autumn evenings, he first perceived, undefinedly, indeed, that the mysterious world of nature round him could afford pleasure independent of the anticipations of fox-hunting or partridge-shooting. Insensibly, too, he felt a reverence for his cousin he had never had for any other woman, though this did not prevent their relation with each other from being of the most lively nature. They frequently quarreled and made it up again, and quarreled again, a form of intercourse as dangerous as it is possible to conceive of between a handsome young man and a beautiful young woman.

CHAPTER XIV.

BLANCHE'S letters home were the common property of her mother and sister, though the former never asked nor expected to see her children's correspondence unless they volunteered to show it. The constant allusions to Horace very promptly awoke uneasy feelings in the minds of both.

"I wish, mamma," said Mabel one day suddenly, "that Blanche didn't talk so much of Horace Radclyffe in her letters."

"I was just wishing the same, dear; and then I blamed myself for thinking her capable of caring for a man like him. Besides, he is engaged."

"They say, mamma, that the wisest people are fools about falling in love; and Horace is very fascinating."

"Do you think so, Mabel?"

"I do, mamma. I doubt, if he had

been Mr. Maynard, if I should have had the courage to say no."

"I wish Blanche were home; for his being engaged is a protection to him rather than to her."

The subject cost Mrs. Seymour much anxious thought. After serious deliberation, she resolved to write a word of warning to her absent child. Did such a warning ever do any good?

The penning of the letter was a great difficulty, and she and Mabel read and re-read it many times, for fear there should be a word in it that could cause a moment's pain.

The Bognor letters reached Deerscourt by the second post, and Blanche always retired to her *sanctum* to enjoy her budget. She perused her mother's carefully-worded epistle twice over, laughed the soft, low, rippling laugh which Horace was already beginning to look forward to and to say things tending to draw it forth, and exclaimed aloud "Dear mamma!"

The idea of Horace Radclyffe becoming essential to her happiness, as her mother had put it, was one she could not contemplate seriously. She would as soon have thought of falling in love with the Cham of Tartary, if there be such a potentate now, as with a man she knew to be engaged, but she did not feel at all hurt by the warning, as Mrs. Seymour had feared. Her love for her mother was too deep to admit of any misunderstanding. She sat down at once and wrote, explaining how impossible it was that she could have refused to ride without seeming to attach more importance to the matter than it was worth, but promising to guard against any further intimacy, and assuring her mother she need not feel uneasy about her.

At the time Blanche wrote this she had probably forgotten her own sentiment, pronounced with such decision to Geoffrey Rivers, that "in generous minds gratitude soon becomes strong affection," and Mrs. Seymour forgot, when she wrote, how much easier it is to give advice from a distance than to follow that advice, be the receiver's intentions ever so good.

Horace's regiment was now stationed at Winterton. He lived at Deerscourt, riding into the town every day for his regimental duties and returning early. Then through the long golden afternoons he lay under the great cedar-tree near the house with his sister and Blanche, who worked or drew while he told stories or fancied he read the papers; or they paddled

in the boat on the part of the lake which the trees shaded, "imagining it was cool," as Blanche said, though in reality much plagued with the flies, which, appreciating the shade themselves, take care that no one else shall; and then after five o'clock tea came the rides, while Mrs. Radclyffe and Leila went for a drive. It was hard under the circumstances not to become intimate.

On the afternoon in question they were to ride to a waterfall, one of the lions of Deerscourt, to meet Mrs. Radclyffe, Leila, and the Millars, at a sort of picnic, got up by the former in honor of Julia Millar's birthday. The Deerscourt domestic tyrant was gone to Scotland for grouse-shooting, and his wife took advantage of his absence to do a civility to the much-abused parson and his family.

Unknown to herself, and in spite of her sage letter, Blanche was entering that enchanted land, all sunshine and flowers at first, certainly, whatever storms may come after—to which, once it is passed, there is no return.

"O, dass sie ewig grünen bliebe,
Die schöne Zeit der jungen Liebe!"

As they rode along under the arching trees the sun, the air, the flowers, the golden cornfields, the water—all were clothed with a hitherto unperceived beauty. Much as she had loved them before, it seemed to her now as if she had never till this moment fully appreciated them. As they came out into the open a lark, "far in the downy cloud," was pouring forth his evening song.

"Listen to that lark; how wonderfully he is singing!" she exclaimed.

"He'd be good spitted, I've no doubt," and he watched her face to see the look, half deprecation, half indignant contempt, with which he knew she would receive his remark.

"You deserve——" She hesitated.

"Well, what?" he asked smiling, and still looking at her.

"Never to hear a lark sing again."

"That wouldn't hurt me, though I'll allow it's jolly to hear the dicky-birds on a fine day like this. Talking of larks reminds me; you commanded me to read that fellow Tennyson—so I did, last night, while I was smoking, and came across something about a lark dropping at a man's feet. What did it do that for? did he shoot it?"

Blanche laughed. "No; I don't think that."

"Then, what the deuce made it fall?"

"I suppose it means that the poet's song was so beautiful as to tame even the wildest things."

"I think that's nonsense, unless, indeed, the poet was a woman, then she might tame men; but as to a lark, I never heard such stuff! Nothing but a gun could bring him down."

"Still you acknowledge the taming power of beauty in some shape?"

"Do you take me for a Goth?"

"The Goths were very fine fellows, and no more despised beauty than you do: and they had great respect for their poet-maidens, too."

"I never thought of a girl-Goth. I always imagined a Goth a great he-savage."

"The girl-Goths must have been very poetical young women! They roused the men up to all sorts of grand deeds."

"That's the right sort of poetry," said Horace.

"Embodied poetry. There was some German woman who was said not to have written poetry, but to have lived it. I always think it is such a splendid idea."

"So it is," said he, without, however, half understanding it: yet some portion of the meaning did reach his mind, as he watched the noble, harmonious face beside him become suddenly grave, as if trying to realize what "living poetry" must be.

They rode on in silence for some time, and then he asked suddenly, "What do you think is the strongest thing in the world?"

"That is the question the wise men undertook to solve long ago," she answered laughing.

"Well, how did they settle it?"

"In a way you won't agree with. They gave the prize to the man who said women were the strongest."

"Why shouldn't I agree with it? there, again, you take me for a Goth."

"You know in your secret heart you think it's a very much finer thing to be a man than a woman."

He gave a half shy, conscious laugh. "Not finer; but I confess I would rather be a man."

"I thought so," she said, shaking back her head, with a soft laugh. "Well, for your comfort, I'll tell you, that with women the man also coupled truth. He decided that women and truth are the strongest things in the world, and I think he was right."

"I don't fancy people think so much of

truth now," said Horace. "They talk about it, but that's all."

"Oh, Colonel Radclyffe, that's a horrible idea! you can't really think so?"

"I do. Mother wouldn't mind telling a story if she thought she wouldn't be found out."

Surely that one remark accounted for many defects in the speaker's character.

"There is great excuse for Aunt Mary," said Blanche, after a pause. "As Leila told me, no one could live with Uncle Charles, if he were told everything."

"Under the same circumstances, would you tell your husband—well, fibs, as mother does?" he asked, looking at her.

"I don't think I should, though one has no right to say so till one is tempted; but then, I should have quarreled long ago and run away."

"Poor mother!" said he; "you see, she couldn't do that because of her children."

"Colonel Radclyffe," said Blanche, her face flushing crimson, and tears starting to her eyes, "don't let us talk of that. It is one of the things I think horribly wicked and unjust, that a wretched woman must bear every sort of cruelty and ill-treatment from her husband, or else lose her children."

He looked in astonishment at her face, every muscle of which was quivering with indignation.

"It does seem hard, certainly," he said. "Still, mother is better off now than if she had left my father," he added by way of soothing her.

"But what a life!" said Blanche, brushing the tears out of her eyes. "It would have killed me."

"Yet you have plenty of pluck, I should say."

"Pluck has nothing to do with it. It would have broken my heart if the person I had loved and trusted behaved so to me. I couldn't bear it all, as Aunt Mary does, and then go up and speak to Uncle Charles, and kiss him as if nothing had happened," and a look of contempt curled her short lip.

"It would do no good to resent his temper," said he, "and I always think that so amiable of mother."

"So it may be, but it's an amiability I should never emulate. What a solemn conversation we have got into!" she exclaimed, after a pause; "shall we have a canter, and forget it?"

When they fell into a walk again she said, "Colonel Radclyffe, I can't really

thank you enough for these delightful rides. I do so enjoy them."

"Shall I tell you how you can thank me?"

"How?" and she looked at him with inquiring eyes.

"Don't always call me Colonel Radclyffe. Why shouldn't we be Blanche and Horace to each other? We're cousins, you know."

The recollection of her mother's letter brought the glowing blood into her cheeks. It was true they were cousins, and why should they not be Blanche and Horace to each other? yet she felt it would be better not. She knew, in spite of a great authority, that there is much in a name, and titles of courtesy *are* a bar to intimacy, though it may be only a slight one. Yet how could she refuse?

"Yes, we're cousins," she said, hesitatingly, "but then, you know, such a very superior cousin as you are ought to be treated with great respect, so I think I shall keep to the old form."

"Does that mean that you won't allow me to call you Blanche?"

"Oh, no; you may call me what you please."

"Then I shall call you Blanche henceforth, and you must call me Horace."

She laughed, and shook her head.

"Indeed you must; it is absurd not, and you said you wanted to thank me."

They had reached the waterfall where the party was assembled, and as he lifted her down, he whispered, "Remember, it is to be Horace in future. I shall be quite affronted if it is not."

CHAPTER XV.

BLANCHE had seen very little of the Millars since her arrival at Deerscourt, the weather being too hot to admit of walks, except in the evening, and then she rode, so that this was the first time she had met Emily Peyton comfortably. A game with the children, during which the two went off to hide together, afforded them an opportunity of having some confidential conversation.

The poor little governess looked worn and anxious, in spite of her brilliant color.

"I've hardly seen you since I've been here," said Blanche. "How have you been getting on?"

"Only pretty well, Miss Seymour; I always seem to do and say the wrong thing."

"What have you done wrong now?"

"Mrs. Millar says I'm so ill-tempered because I don't talk. She says I never open my lips at dinner, or tea, and that it gives an example of sullenness to the children. I always feel so frightened I can't speak, I don't know what to say; and if I do say anything, it's wrong."

"But does she find fault with what you say?"

"Yes; I'll just tell you. The other day I did so try to think of something to say, and as we had been over to Deerscourt in the morning, I remarked how glad I had been to see you. 'You like Miss Seymour?' said Mrs. Millar. I said 'Yes; she is so kind and thoughtful. I don't think I ever met any one so thoroughly good-hearted.' Do you see any harm in that?"

"No harm, certainly," said Blanche laughing. "It's very kind of you to say so, but I see no harm."

"I'm sure I meant none; but Mr. and Mrs. Millar were horrified. They said no one was good-hearted; that we are all as bad as we can be, and Mrs. Millar asked me if I did not know that 'the heart was deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.' I said, 'Yes, I knew that, only that I didn't think you were deceitful and bad;' then they asked me quite solemnly if I denied the doctrine of Original Sin, and it was all so horrid before the children."

"Poor dear!" said Blanche, kindly, "I hope you satisfied them as to your orthodoxy?"

"I said I supposed I believed in Original Sin, though I hadn't ever thought much about it, but that I did not think you were bad-hearted or deceitful. How could I, when you've been so kind, and asked me about mamma and Archie?"

"My dear, that was very small kindness."

"It was great to me," said the girl, tears springing to her eyes; "it felt so horrid coming back here after the holidays, with no one to say a word to about Archie or mamma, and when you asked me about them all, and remembered about the piano for Archie, I *did* think it good of you, and I would not say you were bad for anything in the world."

"Well, dear, I suppose you ought to have acknowledged my badness in the abstract, only you might have said you had not seen any manifestations of it."

"After dinner," went on Miss Peyton, "Mrs. Millar came and talked to me for ever so long about it, and showed me heaps of texts and all that. I said I knew we were bad, of course, and that one of the Articles and the Baptismal Service said so, but that was worse than all, for she said I ought to go by what the Bible taught and not by what was in the Prayer Book, and she asked me if I would then and there go down on my knees before God with her and confess that I was a miserable sinner, and that my own goodness was like filthy rags."

"Oh, dear, how dreadful! I'm afraid I should have laughed."

"I was too much frightened to laugh. We knelt down, and she made a long prayer saying how awfully wicked I was, and then she seemed satisfied. I was so afraid she would send me away."

"What? for heresy? Poor little thing! How can people do such things in the name of religion?"

"This explains what has always puzzled me in the children's books. If any one is said to be *good* or *good-hearted* it is scratched out and *kind* written instead and Jer. xvii. 9 referred to on the margin. The children are taught to think every one bad. I was reading them a story in which there was something about a 'good angel,' and little Mary lisped out, 'Miss Peyton, de angels not dood; dey naughty too, like us.' I think it's dreadful!"

During this conversation the two girls were crouching down behind a clump of bushes, hiding from Leila and the children, but all thoughts of the game had escaped their minds. Emily went on to say that though every one was as bad as possible in the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Millar, the Roman Catholics exceeded in wickedness, so that, as Blanche said, "it was consolatory to think there was a depth left to which we poor Protestants had not descended."

The children did Bible lessons and hunted out texts tending to impress on their minds that millions of their fellow-Christians were doomed to eternal perdition. The fasts and festivals of the Church to which they nominally belonged and of which their father was an ordained priest, were, with the exception of Christmas and Easter, palpably disregarded or openly ridiculed, Ash Wednesday being especially chosen as a day of feasting and rejoicing, while at the same time they were ironically told—"you know you ought to fast to-day. It's very wicked to

eat roast beef and pancakes on Ash Wednesday."

"I do think," concluded Emily, "that I could not bear it only for Archie's sake and to make one less at home. And yet sometimes it seems as if I must be very wrong to feel wearied and disgusted at it all, for they are good people, I'm sure. Do you know, Miss Seymour, that they expect our Lord to come any minute in the day?"

"What do you mean?" asked Blanche in utter surprise; and Emily explained to her that this worthy clergyman and his wife belonged to that school of Evangelical Theology which has made the prophetic portion of the Sacred Volume so exclusively its study, that its members, honestly, no doubt, persuade themselves that they can foretell that supreme moment in the world's history of which the Great Authority has said, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man."

Of the earnest and reverential writers on this grand secret no Christian will be suspected of speaking otherwise than with respect; but what words are strong enough to condemn those who vulgarize and throw ridicule on the whole subject either by trading on it, or by arrogating to themselves such an intimate acquaintance with the mind of the Eternal Master as can only arouse feelings of disgust and horror in all who retain any due sense of the reticence with which such topics ought to be approached!

"They talk so much about the Millennium and the coming of our Lord," said Emily, "that very often I wake up at night in a great fright, fancying I hear the last trumpet."

"Well, I must say it all sounds very irreverent and wrong to me," said Blanche. "How can we tell when the Millennium will be?"

"A celebrated converted Jew is coming to stay with them soon, who says this is the last year of the present dispensation. They are looking forward with great delight to hearing his reasons for his belief."

"Which convinces me they don't believe it themselves," said Blanche. "Look, there are Julia and Leila looking for us."

But the two passed and did not see them. Horace, who was behind, discovered them in a moment.

"I say, Leila, look here," he called out. "You've led us a pretty dance, young ladies; we've been all over the place looking for you. Where have you been?"

"Here, all the time waiting for you to find us, but you are all so stupid," said Blanche, laughing.

"But you ought not to have waited," said Julia; "you ought to have run 'home.' Mamma says Miss Peyton forgot on purpose, as she was with you."

"I did forget, but not on purpose," said Emily, coloring painfully.

"Well, no harm," said Blanche. "I forgot too. How came you not to see us, Leila? Colonel Radclyffe spied us directly."

"That's the third quarrel I've got with you since we've been here," said Horace in a low voice, bending over her as she rose and gathered up her habit.

"What do you mean?"

"I thought it was to be Horace always now." She turned away with a little *moue*. "Leila, I've been thinking how I should like to sketch the waterfall."

"Well, why don't you? I can drive you here any day."

"Oh, I should hate having the pony-carriage to wait for me. I shall walk here to-morrow morning."

"It's too far," said Leila; "you would be too tired to draw when you get here."

"We often walk here," said Miss Peyton, "if you would like to come with us to-morrow."

"That will be charming! I want to sketch that birch-tree above everything."

They rejoined the party, and found Mrs. Radclyffe full of the Millars' expected guest, the converted Jew, whom Mrs. Millar had asked them all to meet the following week.

"You know, dear Leila, we can go quite well," said Mrs. Radclyffe, "as your father is away. It will be so pleasant to meet this Dr. Something; he's a real converted Jew, Mrs. Millar says, and knows all about the end of the world."

"Is the world coming to an end at once?" asked Leila coldly.

"Well, I can't exactly make out, but they seem to think it won't last much longer. It makes one feel quite frightened. I do hope your father will be home first."

What help Mr. Radclyffe could afford in the final catastrophe his wife did not say.

During the ride home Blanche repeated to Horace the substance of her conversation with Emily Peyton, and laughingly told him of her refusal to acknowledge her friend's innate wickedness.

"I should have done just the same," said he. "I was thinking to-day, what

wrong do you ever do? It seems to me you are perfect."

"Oh, no," she said gravely, "it's not right to say that: I feel very often how bad I am."

"Well, come now, what do you ever do wrong?"

"I'm very often cross and out of temper."

"Cross!" said he, laughing. "Why, Blanche, your crossness must be like a little cloud over the sunshine just for a minute, though even that I haven't seen. Cross!" he repeated again, half to himself. "And Leila, and mother, what wrong do they do? You can't really mean it when you say you are 'miserable sinners' and all that in church."

"Well, I'll tell you," she answered, after a pause, "honestly, some nights when I kneel down to say my prayers, I can't think of a thing I've done all through the day that was wrong. I asked Geoffrey about it once."

"And what did he say?"

"I think he hardly knew what to say at first, and then he said we all did many wrong things of which we were unconscious."

"Then I don't call them wrong."

"Oh, yes; a thing may be wrong, though you don't mean it. I think, myself, that when we don't do all the good we might do that that is a positive wrong. I have explained it so to myself since."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE following was one of those glorious days on which existence itself is a pleasure, independent of any especial cause of happiness in the individual. There had been a mist in the morning, and when that cleared away, the rich autumn earth lay bathed in golden sunshine, while "the wind that blew from the gates of the sun" tempered the heat.

Blanche rose feeling all sunshine herself. After breakfast she went up to Leila's boudoir, and, in mere lightness of heart, sat down at the piano, and began singing Haydn's lovely Mermaid Song, "*Now the dancing sunbeams play*," with its most musical and perfect accompaniment. The singer and the song were in unison as she sat, in the full bloom of her joyous youth, the morning sun streaming in on her, and lighting up her rich

hair with glorious tints of gold and brown. She sang the song half through, and then, from the same caprice that made her begin, left off as suddenly, and, looking up, saw Horace standing in the doorway, magnificent and stately, in his uniform. She blushed violently,

"All the spirit deeply dawning in the dark of hazel eyes."

"I thought you were gone," she said. "Do you want Leila?"

"No; I came back to say that I'll come to the waterfall to meet you, and walk home with you. You're going there to sketch, are you not?"

"Yes; but pray don't trouble yourself. I don't dislike a solitary walk."

"I shall be there about two, and I suppose you won't refuse me the honor of walking home with you, though you won't sing to me, or speak of me to Leila except as 'your brother.'"

"Well, you are her brother."

"Leila's brother has a name, as well as other people, and has some claim to an identity of his own. Shall you be too tired to walk home, or shall I order my phaeton to meet us there?"

"Not for the world, thanks. I shall not be at all too tired."

"Good-by, then, for the present," and with a military salute he withdrew.

"How splendid he looks in his uniform!" was the comment in Blanche's mind as he relieved her of his handsome presence. She remembered her mother's letter, and, of course, she only admired him as she would have admired a beautiful picture. There could surely be no harm in that. He was splendidly handsome, and certainly he was very kind—and altogether Blanche felt that life was as pleasant a thing as one could conceive of in a summer's day. And, as she heard his horse's hoofs, she went to the window and looked after him, till the last glimpse of his stately head was lost in the distance.

And he? Well, he was thinking of one of his hunters whose health was unsatisfactory, and debating if he should sell him or not; of a letter he had had from Alice Wentworth containing a bad account of her father; of how he should meet certain bills if she would keep on deferring the marriage; and every now and then, as it were an accompaniment to these thoughts, he heard in fancy a sweet, clear voice trilling out, "*Follow, follow, follow me*," and the rippling music that was the complement of the words. A pair of lovely, fearless, innocent eyes would come, as if

by magic, before his own blue ones—and that low, soft laugh, it was tiresome how he kept on hearing it! As he rode under the trees by the river, his mind went over the conversation of the evening before in that same place. Yes, certainly, she was a very nice girl—quite different to any one he had ever met before—uncommonly beautiful, too, “to my mind, and a rare good-plucked one.” He wondered if anything would frighten her, and then his thoughts reverted to his hunter, and his bills, and so he reached Winterton.

Mrs. Radclyffe and Leila had to make a call that morning on business which would detain them so long that they could not be back for lunch. Blanche, therefore, was not tied to hours, and started joyfully with Emily Peyton and the Millars, when they called for her. Emily looked even more anxious and worried than usual, and was not long in informing Blanche of the cause.

The preceding evening, as she was sitting alone in the school-room, the children being in bed, Mrs. Millar came in to look for a book, and while doing so came across three torn Bibles.

“Oh, Miss Peyton,” said she, “I always think it undesirable to see torn Bibles about; would you, therefore, set light to the fire, and burn these three belonging to the children?” and she handed her the Books.

Intense horror and astonishment seized the poor girl, and prevented her making any reply. Mrs. Millar, not noticing her silence, and having found what she wanted, left the room. For more than an hour Emily sat in a trance of dumb fear, gradually becoming icy cold.

Do people who have themselves passed the age of early youth ever imagine what agonies of fear the young endure? Everything is so new to them, and, in spite of the self-confidence attributed to the young, they are so afraid of themselves, and have so little belief in their own powers.

Great as was her awe of Mrs. Millar, and much as she dreaded being “sent home,”—that terror which was always before her eyes,—she could not bring herself to light a fire, and deliberately commit three Bibles to the flames. The greater fear overpowered the less. Burn a Bible! The fate of that Judæan king and his nobles who burned the roll of the book in the Winter Palace came vividly to her mind. Of all crimes possible for her to commit, imagination had never pictured such a one as this!

No martyr, witnessing for the truth, suffered more in the struggle between natural fear and a sense of duty than did this poor child as she went to her room, carrying with her the three Volumes, which she carefully hid in a drawer, praying that morning might bring her some help. At all events she could consult “dear Miss Seymour,” that friend whom Providence had surely sent to be a comfort to her in her troubles. Accordingly, she laid the whole matter before her, as the children went on in front, looking eagerly at her to gather her opinion.

“Well, it sounds very dreadful to burn the Bible,” was Blanche’s remark, “and I wouldn’t do it myself; still, when you come to think of it, it’s hard to know what to do with torn ones, if they won’t bind.”

“But you would not burn one yourself?”

“Well, no, I would rather not, though I don’t think I should feel as if I had committed a sin if I did. I should know I had only done it to prevent the leaves from being thrown about.”

Emily felt somewhat comforted. Her hero-worship was of a most simple sort. In her eyes Blanche could do no wrong; and if she was not horrified at such a proposal, why, perhaps, Mrs. Millar was not so very much to be dreaded after all.

“Then, what shall I do?” she asked, fixing her dark eyes on her friend’s face.

“I should tell Mrs. Millar I disliked doing it.”

“You don’t know how frightened I should feel. I don’t think I should be able to get a word out.”

“Then write her a note, and leave it in her room with the Bibles. She’ll respect your motive, if she has a spark of good feeling.”

This was such a simple expedient, that Emily wondered she had not thought of it before.

Blanche wrote a copy of the letter for her on a leaf of her pocket-book, and by the time they reached the waterfall she had recovered from the access of fear and trembling into which such an unusual request had thrown her.

The best point for the sketch was chosen, and Blanche sat down, surrounded by her paraphernalia. Emily insisted on carrying a big stone from some distance, to serve as a footstool for her friend, feeling that no exertion she could ever make could anything like express her love and admiration for her.

The Millars stayed some time; and

talking, as usual, was not conducive to progress in the work in hand, but after their departure the sketch progressed rapidly. She worked diligently for a couple of hours, then the walk and the sun combined began to make her feel tired. She laid down her brush and fell into a reverie. The sky was sapphire above her. The trees, though enough to keep off the glare, cast little shadow; the soft wind that stirred the leaves produced a certain freshness, and caused that dreamy rustle in the tree-tops which is music in itself, while the water sparkled and danced with its millions of reflected hues and its own unceasing song. What grand symphonies there are in Nature! How finely do sounds unmusical, perhaps, in themselves, combine together into one harmonious whole!

There was a lime-tree a little way off, whence came "the murmur of innumerable bees," and as Blanche sat still and listened, the fish leaped in the water, a hare ran fearlessly close to her, a weasel darted across the path, and every now and then a squirrel would spring from a tree, run a little way, like a golden flash, and then stop with tail erect, and gaze curiously at her out of its bright eyes. A poetic fancy might imagine that the squirrel knew it would sustain no injury from that gentle nature, but truth must confess that had Blanche moved hand or foot, it would have darted away to its home in the tree, faster almost than the eye could follow it. So absorbed was she that she did not notice an approaching footstep, nor was she aware of a figure at a little distance, standing still and contemplating her. Had she looked up she would have seen Horace coming over the soft grass, through the sunlight, and motioning to his dog, who was on the point of bounding forward, to remain still.

She was sitting on a projecting bit of rock, her brown holland dress just showing one foot resting on the stone Emily had brought her. She had taken her hat off, and her head was turned towards the water, while

"Beauty born of murmuring sound
Had passed into her face."

He stood still for some minutes gazing, and then strode forward, sending a squirrel scampering away, and making her start so violently as to drop her drawing-block.

"Colonel Radclyffe, how you frightened me! I never heard you coming."

He held out his hand. "I didn't mean

to startle you;" then stooping to pick up the block, "why, how you have got on! What a pretty picture you have made!"

"It is, isn't it? but it's not quite done yet. I got rather tired, and was resting."

He had a basket hung over his shoulder.

"What have you there?" she asked.

He sat down and opened it. "When I got home I asked if you had taken any lunch with you, and hearing not, I thought something eatable and drinkable might not be unacceptable after your walk," and he produced a horn cup, a bottle of cider, and some comestibles.

"How kind and thoughtful of you! I brought a few biscuits in my basket, but they are gone long ago, and I confess I'm rather hungry, and very thirsty."

"Then it's all right, and we'll have some lunch," and he spread out the things.

"Haven't you had any lunch either?"

"No; I thought I'd have it with you."

"I never met any one so thoughtful as you are. This is delightful; and if you are in no hurry, I can finish my drawing."

"I'm in no hurry, certainly, and came here to wait on you."

"I wonder I never heard you coming."

"The wind is the other way. A squirrel was sitting and looking at you as impudently as possible when I came up."

"Yes; there have been so many. Dear little things! they are so pretty."

"If I had my gun here, I should shoot some of them."

"Shoot them? Why? they are so graceful and pretty."

"Yes, but they are mischievous little animals."

"Oh, I hope you won't! I shall be sorry I came if you do," she said, looking pleadingly at him.

"Then I won't, if you don't wish it. Only if I shot a dozen, there would still be lots left."

"But they look so happy. Why should you want to kill them?"

"There are so many; the woods at Deerscourt are full of them. Do you know what I thought as I came up?" he asked, after a pause, with a half-shy smile.

"No; what?"

"Why, when I saw that squirrel looking at you so close, it reminded me of what we were saying yesterday about the lark falling at the man's feet, and the power of beauty."

This was such a poetical flight for him that he looked quite ashamed of it.

"I'm utterly guiltless of poetry," she

said smiling; "I never could make a rhyme in my life, but since I have been here heaps of little animals have run by,—squirrels, rabbits, and hares, and I saw a weasel or stoat go across too."

"Did you?" said he eagerly. "I must tell the keeper; he ought to come and look them up."

"Why don't you shoot them instead of my poor squirrels, Colonel Radclyffe? a weasel isn't pretty, and it really is mischievous."

"I swear, Blanche, I'll shoot every squirrel about the place if you keep on calling me Colonel Radclyffe."

"If you will promise not to shoot them, I'll call you Horace for the term of my natural life," and then, the repast being ended, she resumed her painting, and he threw his great length on the ground at her feet, so that he could watch her face and all her operations. No more squirrels came, being warned off by the voices, though Blanche told him it was consciousness of his murderous intentions which kept them away.

How many a time afterwards did she think of this day! And Horace never saw a squirrel, in after-years, that it did not bring to his mind his beautiful cousin as she was then in her golden time. He always henceforth looked on the graceful little creatures as her especial favorites, and spared them for her sake, which, considering the love of killing which was inherent in his nature, may be taken as a strong proof of his regard for her.

"Why do you wear such ugly neckties?" she asked suddenly, after a pause, during which she had been painting vigorously.

"Ugly, Blanche?" said he, opening his eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. You ought, with your hair and complexion, always to wear red or dark blue, instead of which you have mixtures of all sorts of hideous colors. Now, don't move more than you can help, because I'm in the act of putting you into my foreground, but do just tie this handkerchief of mine on instead of that atrocious thing," and she took off her own dark-blue necktie and threw it to him.

He looked more gratified than the occasion seemed to warrant as he fastened it round his throat.

"But won't you catch cold without it?"

"No. I'll tie my pocket-handkerchief on. That will do."

"Why, that must be damp. I've seen you wiping your painting with it. Will you honor me by accepting my necktie, though it is so ugly?"

"Thanks; my handkerchief is rather damp, as you say."

"I don't see that it looks so ugly at all," said he, as he watched her tie it on.

"You can't think it as pretty as my own blue one?"

"Well, no; but it looks very nice on you. However, as you command me, I'll wear blue or red for the future."

"There!" she exclaimed, "you look very picturesque. See! Should you know yourself?"

The figure was thoroughly characteristic, and he contemplated it with a feeling of gratification which was not vanity, and of ever-increasing admiration for the artist.

They walked home when the great heat was over, through the woods, across the breezy hill, amid the yellowing corn-fields, and then by the river all bathed in Nature's sunshine, and reflecting besides that other light created by their own hearts.

When they reached home she unfastened his tie and returned it to him.

He hesitated before taking it. "It's too ugly for you to keep, I suppose," he said, in his half-shy way, "but I shall retain yours as a remembrance of our day, and as a pattern, too, of what I ought to wear."

"Oh, certainly; and I advise you to give those ugly ones of yours to some deserving friend. Thank you for having carried my things and bringing me lunch. We've had a delightful walk home. I wonder if Leila is come back?" and she went up-stairs.

Horace stood on the steps, feeling somehow slightly mortified that she had not volunteered to keep his handkerchief. Of course he knew she was quite right; in fact, she probably had never thought of doing so. He was not eligible, therefore why should she care to have anything of his? and yet he had enjoyed that afternoon so much himself, that he would have liked the companion of it to have shown some wish to keep it in remembrance.

CHAPTER XVII.

BLANCHE, feeling a glow of happiness at her heart, went up to Leila's boudoir, and not finding her there, proceeded to her bedroom in search of her. She found

her looking pale and rigid, as she always did when distressed.

"What's the matter?" asked Blanche.

"Oh, Blanche, we drove to the station to fetch a parcel, and there we met Sir George Conway, his sister and aunt, whom he introduced to mamma; and as they said they were coming to call, she asked them to lunch on Thursday. Isn't it dreadful? what shall I do?"

There was very little consolation to offer, and Blanche could only say vaguely that she was sure Sir George would not persist in his suit if he found it disagreeable to her.

Mrs. Radclyffe was full of the meeting and of the charms of Miss Conway and Lady Eveleigh. She was one of that numerous and tiresome class who think that if you only say a thing often enough it will be believed at last; she was so constituted that she could not understand the feeling of dislike, bred of utter weariness, which can be conceived for persons and things from merely hearing them constantly lauded. That Athenian whose final vote exiled Aristides would have been an incomprehensible being to her, had she ever heard of him.

She sang the praises of the whole Conway family all the evening, while Leila listened in statuesque silence. "Edythe Conway was so handsome and *distinguée*-looking," the fact being that she was only very pleasant and lady-like. Then Lady Eveleigh! what a charming woman! so clever and agreeable! the individual in question being, though good and excellent, the very reverse of clever and the most homely of her sex. It was in vain Horace hinted to his mother that "cramming the Conways down Leila's throat would do no good." On such advice as that, even though coming from her dear Horace, she could not act.

Leila rose on Thursday morning wondering if it would be possible to run away and escape the whole thing. She went about her usual avocations feeling sick from a vague fear; and when at one o'clock a carriage drove up to the door, and Blanche, who was at the window, said it contained only two ladies, the sudden relief turned her quite faint.

"I dare say he's riding, though," she said, as if her mind could not accept the reprieve.

"Well, come down and get the meeting with them over at any rate, and we'll hope he won't come. No man not a lunatic would ride such a scorching day when he could drive."

Horace met them on the stairs.

"Leila, I was coming up to relieve your mind. Conway isn't coming. He has sent all sorts of excuses—so much to see to, having been away so long, etc."

His sister's face expressed the joy she felt. She could not speak, but silently kissed him.

"There now, you see, dear," said Blanche, "I told you he would not come," and they went into the drawing-room, where Edythe Conway came forward to greet Leila with a cordiality it was next to impossible to resist.

"I'm so glad to see you and to come to Deerscourt. I've always wanted to see it so much; I hear it is such a lovely place. My aunt and I think it so kind of Mrs. Radclyffe to have asked us. How are you? I hope stronger than you were in London."

All this was poured forth in a breath, unrepressed by Leila's icy manner.

"I am quite well, thank you, and was well in London," was her reply.

"I didn't at all expect the pleasure of seeing you here," went on Edythe, turning to Blanche, and shaking hands warmly.

"I came back with Leila. How lovely the country is!" which very original remark was intended to cover Leila's coldness.

"Is it not? I'm so glad to be able to come to Leighton Court; I very seldom can on account of my health, but the weather is so lovely now, my doctor said I might venture for a month."

There was a picture gallery at Deerscourt which was one of the county lions, and after lunch it was duly done by the visitors. Doing the honors of this gallery in company with her parents was one of the trials of Leila's life. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Radclyffe had the slightest appreciation of the artistic merits of the pictures, some of which were really good, but they were an adjunct to Deerscourt, and added to their own importance, and as such were highly valued. Then *parvenus* and counter-jumpers could not exhibit such a gallery, with real ancestors and ancestresses whose history, back to a reasonable period, was well authenticated, though there was a region of myth beyond. This was a thought which never failed to afford satisfaction to Mr. Radclyffe. He was unaware of that refinement of civilization which purveys itself ancestors by contract in Wardour Street, and language would have been entirely inadequate to express his contempt for

that northern millionaire who argued, that as all mechanical contrivances have been improved in this nineteenth century, as we live more comfortably, travel more expeditiously, know more about science, etc., so, of course, new colors have been discovered, painters know how to mix them better, *therefore* modern pictures *must* be better than those painted by men who could not "hold a candle to our fellows."

Next to seeing her father show the pictures off, Leila dreaded to find her mother undertake the office of *cicerone*. Both were equally ignorant of art, and mixed up Flemish, Italian, and English schools in inextricable and delightful confusion; but Mr. Radclyffe did not affect any enthusiasm (though he was fully imbued with the notion that he was a competent critic and able to pronounce an opinion on any picture), while Mrs. Radclyffe was given to becoming ecstatic on the beauties of painting; and if there were a defect peculiarly glaring she was sure to pitch on it as the especial charm of the picture.

As the ladies walked through the gallery, Horace bringing up the rear, Leila listened with a marble look of self-repression, and Blanche with ever-increasing wonder and amusement, to her aunt's statement to Lady Eveleigh "that she was so fond of painting that she spent hours in walking up and down the gallery, and looking at these lovely pictures," assuring her visitor, who received the communication with commendable gravity, that "art had a most soothing effect on her mind."

Horace elevated his eyebrows, as an aside to Leila, it being a well-known fact that, except to walk round with the house-keeper to see that the housemaids had done their duty in the way of dusting, Mrs. Radclyffe never entered the gallery unless she had visitors. It need scarcely be said that the pictures were all originals, and Blanche's risible nerves were sorely tried as she heard her aunt gravely expatiating on the merits of a Flemish Interior, which, she informed Lady Eveleigh, was the undoubted work of a celebrated Italian painter named Vandyck. Her eyes, dancing with suppressed laughter, met Edythe Conway's, also brimming over with fun, and that one look made a bond between them which months of ordinary intercourse could not have done. It touched Leila too nearly for her to be amused; as she said to Blanche, "you would not laugh if your mother talked such nonsense."

"Yes, I should," said Blanche; "I should see that pictures weren't her strong point, and lament that she set up as a *connoisseur*, but I shouldn't look like a martyr about it! I should think how clever she was in other things."

After the gallery had been duly done Edythe and Blanche fell behind, and the latter said, "My brother would have been so glad to come to-day, but he thought it better not, though it cost him an effort."

"How was that?" inquired Blanche.

"Well, you know, we met Leila at the station, but she looked so distressed at seeing George, and would hardly speak to him, and never said a word when Mrs. Radclyffe asked us to lunch, that he wouldn't come to-day, thinking it would be disagreeable to her."

"That is generous of him," said Blanche.

"He is generous!" said his sister emphatically, "and, of course, he says he wouldn't persecute a girl to marry him: only I can't think why Leila won't like him a little." This was the old story, to which Blanche had no reply to make.

"Do you think," went on Edythe, "that Mrs. Radclyffe would bring you all over one day to Leighton to lunch? George told Aunt Kate to ask."

"I have no doubt she will be most happy to do so."

"But do you think Leila will like it? George would not, for the world, do anything to vex her."

To this Blanche could only make an evasive answer, and fortunately at that moment Horace came and made a diversion. The more she saw of Edythe Conway the more she liked her. There was a straightforwardness about her which was very attractive, and her adoration of her brother, and wish to insure his happiness, were most touching. She referred to him every time she was alone with Blanche, whom she had adopted at first sight as her *confidante*, divining by a sort of free-masonry that she would not betray her.

"How lonely poor George will be!" she exclaimed; "and he will be wondering all the time if I am talking to Leila! but she will hardly speak to me. I've tried ever so often to-day."

"You know, Miss Conway, the saying, that 'there is no making people suit.' I'm sure it's a very true one."

"Then you think George has no chance?"

"I don't express any opinion about that," and Blanche felt she had committed herself. She did not know how to steer clear between the two girls, both of

whom would confide in her. She was relieved when the carriage came, and the visitors took their departure, having arranged that Mrs. Radclyffe and her party were to go over to Leighton Court one day in the following week.

Mrs. Radclyffe was very angry at Leila's conduct;—angry and puzzled, though she did her best to hide it.

"You make no mistake about showing when you don't like people, Leila," was Horace's remark when they were alone.

"I don't dislike them more than I should any one under the same circumstances," said she, laying aside her freezing manner.

"Well, you know your own affairs best," replied her brother; "but I think you are mistaken."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Reverend Dr. Hermann Selbsttäuscher had arrived at the Rectory. As his time was limited, his engagements being numerous, and the day of grace being very near its close (be it remembered that he *honestly* believed that another New Year's Day would not dawn on this world), the Deerscourt party was invited to meet him on the evening of his arrival. A week-day service, quite an unusual event under the Millar *régime*, was announced for the following day, in order to afford all who were so disposed an opportunity of hearing the stranger propound his views. The success of the service was doubtful. It was harvest-time, and the British farmer is prone to living in the present. It was much to be feared that the dread of "rain coming up," which the weather-wise foretold, would overpower the wish to be enlightened as to the coming end, and the effect which the comet hanging nightly in the heavens (truly alarming as it was) was to have on the destinies of mankind.

Mrs. Radclyffe was in an intense state of excitement. A converted Jew was a great event in her life. She had but one idea of a Jew,—a man with a bag, very dirty-looking, and crying out some words she could not understand, but which, she was informed, were "old clo'." She had also heard of a Jew in connection with a sad episode in the life of her son Horace,—an episode resulting in her being privately obliged to have recourse to the

family lawyer, who had stood her friend in many trials;—but a Jew as a man, who looked clean like other men, who might even speak, perhaps, like an ordinary Briton, and with whom ladies might associate, was an unknown quantity to her. She had some misgivings as to whether it would be *comme il faut* to take Leila and Blanche to meet him in her husband's absence, but she reflected that such good people as the Millars would not ask her to do anything that was wrong, and she certainly had met some of the Schwartzwalds in society, but then they were exceptional Jews. However, she determined to make all right by consulting "dear Horace," which she did, calling him into her boudoir with great solemnity for the purpose. He quite reassured her; for though he pronounced authoritatively that he had no doubt "the Jew was all a humbug," still he could see no harm in their going "if they had a fancy that way."

"You wouldn't come too, dear boy?" she asked, rather doubtfully.

"No, mother," said he, smiling and shaking his head. "I don't believe in converted Jews. Besides, a man ought to stick to his own religion."

"But, dear Horace, you would like the Jews to become good Christians, shouldn't you?"

"I should, mother, if it would make them more conscionable in their dealings with poor devils of Christians like me when we're in Queer Street, otherwise I can't say I care."

"Still I wish you would come, dear; Mrs. Millar asked you, and it looks so odd neither you nor your father ever calling at the Rectory."

"Well, mother, if you wish it, I'll go, though I never knew a Jew who wasn't a rascal; but as I've nothing to do at home, I may as well go, only I hate that fellow Millar so confoundedly."

In the evening Mrs. Radclyffe "whipped up her pack," as Horace termed it, and started in great joy to the Rectory. They were early, and the Reverend Doctor had not made his appearance when they were ushered into the drawing-room. He came down just as tea was being announced, for the meal they were invited to partake of was a compromise between dinner and tea, lacking the comforts of both, commonly denominated High Tea.

He was a very small, dark man, with piercing black eyes, a strong German accent, and an unmistakable Hebrew physiognomy.

When they were seated at table, Mrs. Millar, after an elaborate grace, and while balancing the tea-pot in her hand, turned at once to the Reverend Doctor, who sat on her right, and asked him, as though continuing a conversation which had only just been interrupted—

“And are you a Pre-Millenarian or a post?”

In justice to Dr. Selbsttäuscher, it must be said that this sudden and unexpected question seemed to astonish him as much as it did the guests present.

“I beg your pardon,” said he, stammering. “I—I—I did not quite understand.”

“Are you a Pre-Millenarian or a post?” repeated the lady.

“I much fear—I am afraid, I verstehe not was dat means,” he returned, blundering into his vernacular in his surprise.

“Do you hold that the final judgment will take place before or after the Millennium?”

Such a startling style of conversation quite overcame Horace Radclyffe; and after one glance at his face, Blanche did not venture to look again, for fear of laughing. Mrs. Radclyffe could only deplore her own ignorance. She did not even know clearly what the Millennium meant; but she listened eagerly in hopes of obtaining some definite knowledge as to when she might expect to quit this mortal scene.

Dr. Selbsttäuscher was a man over whose mind one idea had acquired entire predominance. He was perfectly sincere, and Horace remarked to Blanche, “you can’t but respect the little fellow, you see so plainly he means every word he says.” He explained in good English and with great clearness his views, which were that the present dispensation was at an end, and the final judgment at hand.

“I quite agree with you, Dr. Selbsttäuscher,” said Mrs. Millar; “and, like the late Dr. Cunningham, I expect to see the Lord in the air any morning.”

“Do you really?” asked Mrs. Radclyffe quite aghast. “Then why are not we all ready?”

“Why, indeed?” ejaculated Mr. Millar, solemnly.

The young people, as was befitting during such a weighty discussion, maintained a discreet silence. The discussion in itself was harmless;—only glaringly out of place, and it was with a sense of extreme relief that Blanche and Leila saw Mrs. Millar move to leave the table. They adjourned to the garden, where Dr.

Selbsttäuscher continued to descant on his favorite topic. He was very anxious to make a convert of Horace, a stalwart young *militaire* being a disciple quite out of the common. That warrior listened with commendable gravity and respect, making no reply, but treasuring up every word, in order to consult Blanche on the subject.

We soon contract habits; and this one of consulting Blanche about everything was growing very strong in Horace. A man is seldom or ever quite at his ease with the girl he is engaged to. There is a wish only to show the best side, which prevents perfect freedom of intercourse. Horace was not at all at his ease with Alice Wentworth, but there was no effort in his intimacy with Blanche. He would ask her with simple confidence the meaning of anything he did not understand; and one proof of the ascendancy she was acquiring over him was the unquestioning way in which he received all she said. He felt no hesitation in letting her see how ignorant he was of many things which were to her the a b c of education, and she would give the information he wanted in an unaffected way, as if it were the most natural thing in the world that he should ask it. He never ventured to let Alice know when he was ignorant of any subject on which they spoke.

While he was being thus indoctrinated, Blanche and Emily Peyton walked about the garden, and the latter informed her friend that she had written the note to Mrs. Millar, as she had advised, and placed it with the Bibles on her desk.

“And what did she say?”

“She has never alluded to it, but she looks and speaks more coldly than ever.”

“Well, never mind; you did what you thought right. What news have you from home?”

“Archie is very ill; he suffers more and more from his back.”

“You have not got the piano yet?”

“No; there was a heavy doctor’s bill to pay, so I couldn’t; but I hope to do it yet.”

The ringing of a bell recalled them to the house. At the door they met Horace and Leila looking much disgusted.

“Conceive mamma’s staying for prayers!” whispered the latter.

Horace came behind Blanche to assist her in taking off her cloak. “I say, Blanche, this is more than I bargained for. Mother’s regularly put me in it for it.”

“Now, Horace, do be good,” said she

turning her head back to look up at him, "and don't try to make me laugh."

It was the first time she had ever addressed him as "Horace," and his face lit up with pleasure.

"I'll be good, Blanche, you'll see; I'll do anything in the world you ask me," and his voice softened.

Why did Blanche's heart give a great leap? why did she think how delightful it would be to talk all this over with Horace? why did she go into the rectorial drawing-room looking so radiant and beautiful that even Mr. Millar and the learned Dr. Selbsttäuscher came down from the heights of prophetic interpretation to speak to her, and for a moment the thought occurred to both that with the end of the present dispensation would also come the end of some pleasant things—vanities, it may be—for were not Blanche Seymour's graceful figure and brilliant complexion, her pearly teeth and sweet smile, the most insidious of all vanities? Still they were pleasant and goodly to look upon. Mr. Millar could not consider her otherwise than as a brand ready for the burning. Had she not quoted the Apocrypha in his very presence? she "observed days and months, and times and years." Yet now he felt softened towards her; and as he looked at her and she met his gaze with her frank, earnest eyes, some faint perception of Miss Peyton's refusal to call her deceitful dawned on him. She was, no doubt, a brand, but she was a pleasanter brand than Leila Radclyffe, with her cold, self-contained manner. This reflection was instantly dismissed, as unbecoming the gravity proper to even the most secret thoughts of an Evangelical Christian on the subject of brands. It could only be a suggestion of the Evil One which tempted him to prefer one brand to another.

The company sat down, ranged round the room, and when the servants had come in and taken their places, Mr. Millar rose and gave out a hymn, of which he sang the first line. The effect of hearing a man not much accustomed to singing execute a solo is always more or less trying to the facial muscles of the listeners, but in the present instance it was inexpressibly so. The whole proceeding was so new to the Deerscourt party, that it was with the utmost difficulty the young people kept their countenances. Mrs. Radclyffe evidently thought it all *en règle* and very edifying. It was one of those airs which Mr. Millar was in the habit of describing as "good Protestant tunes,"

with an infinite variety of roulades, turns, repeats, and shakes, truly wonderful to listen to and rendering it very difficult to sing in unison. but that did not trouble the musicians. Each one sang in the key that was right in his own ears, and the effect was simply appalling to any luckless individual gifted with musical sensibilities. However, it was hearty singing. The Millar children and servants lifted up their voices with a *verve* and energy which showed they thoroughly enjoyed the exercise. Poor souls! it was almost the only recreation they were allowed.

When this most astonishing performance was over Mr. Millar announced that his reverend friend would read a chapter from the Revelation (only Mr. Millar said Revelations) and expound it, that all might have the advantage of hearing his views on such an important part of Holy Scripture. Accordingly Dr. Selbsttäuscher proceeded with one of those mysterious chapters, the interpretation of which would seem, to ordinary minds, to present such difficulties that the greatest learning, judgment, and discretion must be brought to the task; but he expounded it in perfect assurance that his views were the only ones possible to be entertained on it; and that as he had obtained the key to the mighty vision, he could with authority pronounce on every detail of time and circumstance.

The exposition being ended, there followed another hymn and a long extempore prayer full of endless repetitions. During this prayer Mrs. Millar's feelings so got the better of her, that she gave utterance to various pious ejaculations, no doubt profitable to herself, but tending somewhat to disturb the devotions of the rest of the assembly. In truth, the effect was more ludicrous than it is at all possible to describe, and Blanche was thankful when they rose, as Horace, who knelt beside her, in spite of his promise to be good, would keep on looking at her from time to time, looks of which she was fully conscious though her face was buried in her handkerchief.

"Mother," said he the moment they were off their knees, "let's go now. I can't stand any more of this."

She looked at him with alarm in her face. The conduct of the masculine portion of her belongings was always a great source of anxiety to her. It was true Horace's behavior had been exemplary all the evening, but what manifestation was he going to make now? She hastened to say good-night before

some overt act should spoil the good opinion the Millars and "that clever Jew" must have formed of him. Mrs. Millar said they had had an "edifying evening," and Dr. Selbsttäuscher went up to Blanche and hoped he had been instrumental in convincing her of the perilous times in which we lived, and how uncomfortable it behoved us all to be. She looked down at the little man with kindly amusement, making some courteous answer, and he won Emily Peyton's heart by remarking to her as Blanche left the room "that she was a sweet maiden and a God-fearing one, he had no doubt."

No one who is thoroughly in earnest can fail to make some impression even on the most incredulous, and Dr. Selbsttäuscher's discourse had considerably affected the Deerscourt party, Horace and his mother especially. Blanche and Leila were less open to conviction, the former from a sense of fun, which caused her to see only the ludicrous side of it, and also from an unconscious certainty she felt that it was not given to mortal man to pronounce on such matters: Leila disliked the whole Rectory family and their surroundings too much to be seriously impressed by anything they said. But Mrs. Radclyffe was greatly disturbed in her mind. If she had ever thought that the world would one day come to an end, that "the everlasting mountains should be scattered" and "the perpetual hills should bow," that "this goodly frame the earth with its majestic roof fretted with golden fire" would be no more, she never connected herself or her concerns in any way with the change. The idea that she might be a witness of the mighty consummation was, to her, very appalling; still, being of a practical turn, she reflected that if the world did come to an end at once, it would save all further anxiety on the score of Leila's marriage. She knew that in that other world they neither married nor were given in marriage; and though such a state of things was puzzling, and she could not agree with her daughter, who considered it one of the blessings of heaven that there was no place there for the Holy Estate, still she could not deny that it would be a relief not to have to bend Leila to a union with Sir George Conway, with the alternative of seeing her grow old in her father's house. It was a novel way of making the best of both worlds, but it afforded some comfort to Mrs. Radclyffe.

Horace gave it as his opinion that "the

whole concern was the rummiest go" he had ever seen. The August moon was rising in splendor and flinging a flood of light over the dark woods. He looked up at it for a minute or two, puffing away at his cigar. "Then, I suppose, there will be no moon or anything," he said in a tone of wonder, as if some new idea were taking possession of his mind.

"Don't you think Dr.—I can't say his name—is a very charming man, dear Leila?" inquired Mrs. Radclyffe.

"No, mamma; I thought him horrid."

Mrs. Radclyffe looked snubbed, as she always did when her daughter declined to subscribe to her opinions.

"I didn't think him horrid, Leila," said Blanche.

"Indeed, no," said Mrs. Radclyffe, a perfect gush of gratitude in her voice. "It's so nice of you to say so, dear Blanche. I thought him a charming man! In fact, he is quite different to what I expected."

"What did you expect, mother?" asked Horace.

"Well, you know, dear, I had never met a Jew, so I hardly knew what to expect, especially in a converted Jew; but he seems just like other men, only very small. After all, why should a Jew be different? Our Lord was a Jew, you know, if you come to think of it."

"Haden't that occurred to you before, Aunt Mary?" inquired Blanche.

"Well, you see, dear, I hadn't thought of it," replied Mrs. Radclyffe apologetically.

CHAPTER XIX.

LEILA offered all the opposition possible, without coming to an open rupture with her mother, to being taken to lunch at Leighton Court, but yielded at last out of sheer weariness.

"It will look so odd, Leila, to go without you. In fact, I won't do it. Why did you let me accept the invitation if you didn't mean to go?"

"You knew I did not want to go, mamma, but I could not dictate to you before Lady Eveleigh."

"I am sure I did it for the best," said Mrs. Radclyffe in the lachrymose voice she always assumed as a last resource with Leila. "I meant no harm."

This was not true. She did mean harm in so far that she was forcing her

child's inclination, and hoped for a tangible result therefrom.

Leila quitted the room, and rushing from the house, threw herself on the ground under a tree in a distant part of the park. Her heart was full of bitterness and despair,—the despair of youth, which as often as not has no adequate cause, but is not the less a real agony, and may produce the most disastrous effects if the sufferer does not meet with judicious treatment. After many hours Blanche found her, chilled and pallid. She gave what comfort she could. "You know, dearest," she observed by way of consolation, "Horace is coming, and Sir George will have to walk about with him, so he won't have much time to talk to you."

"I didn't know Horace was coming. What has made him take such a turn for visiting, I wonder?"

"Didn't he always do so?"

"No. He never used to come anywhere with us. I suppose he comes to report progress to mamma," she said bitterly. "He's as anxious as she is to force me to marry a man I hate."

Leighton Court was a beautiful place,—an old Gothic house and magnificent gardens. Mrs. Radclyffe might be pardoned the natural regret she felt that her daughter, who might at any moment be mistress of it, persisted in throwing away such a prospect, independently of the advantage of having such a husband as Sir George Conway.

That much-to-be-desired baronet was standing on the steps to meet them as the carriage drove up, and his look of delight on seeing Leila was unmistakable. She certainly justified his admiration. The form of her face was perfect, her complexion clear, though colorless, and she would have been beautiful had her large gray eyes with their curling lashes ever reflected any tender feeling. To-day she looked more animated than usual, for Horace and Blanche had quarreled violently in the morning, and during the drive would hardly speak to each other, or if they did, confined their remarks to mutual *coups de patte*, which afforded her great amusement. Notwithstanding the cold manner she assumed, she looked so thoroughbred, and was so graceful in all her movements, that she was charming in spite of herself. Sir George did not in any degree force his attentions on her, but it was evident enough she was for him the one woman in the world,—for the present at least. He did the honors of his house, of which he was both fond and proud, perfectly,

and even Leila had to acknowledge that he was delightful, if only he had not wanted to marry her.

After lunch he said to her, "I know you play the organ, and I am going to take the liberty of asking you if you would try the one in the hall here, and tell me if you think it worth doing anything to. It has not been touched since my poor mother's death, as unfortunately my sister is not strong enough to play, even if she were here."

There was a very fine organ in the hall, and he stood and blew patiently while she played. From long disuse it was dreadfully out of tune, and he consulted her eagerly as to having it put in order.

"When I'm away," he said, "it would be a work of charity if you would drive over sometimes and play on it."

"I'm afraid my little ponies would object to such an arrangement," she replied. "Ten miles here and ten back is an exertion they are not used to."

"George," said Edythe, "I wish you would sing. Miss Radclyffe" (she did not venture on the Christian name to Leila in person), "perhaps you don't know that he has a beautiful tenor, only he is such a lazy fellow, he never will sing."

Leila's love of music was a passion, and a tenor her special weakness. She looked up at him with a momentary animation, and a request in her eyes, but almost immediately relapsed into her usual manner, though politeness obliged her to say, "Won't you sing something?"

"I shall be most happy, if you will play for me."

In another sphere of life his voice would have been his fortune. It was simply perfect, and Leila was enchanted, though the singer had no knowledge of music, and it was not very easy to accompany him, his notions of time being erratic.

The day passed off more satisfactorily than she had expected, and she was congratulating herself on its being well over when, shortly before they went away, her mother requested her to go up to Lady Eveleigh's room for her handkerchief which she had left there. The house was large, and she not very sure of the way; however, she got the handkerchief, and thought she was returning just as she had come. Somehow she took a wrong turn, and found herself wandering about she knew not where. At last she ventured on opening a door, hoping it would lead her somewhere. It did lead to a small landing with a staircase, and coming down this staircase was Sir George Conway,

with a splendid bouquet of hot-house flowers in his hand.

"I've lost my way," said Leila, blushing crimson. "I went to get mamma's handkerchief from Lady Eveleigh's room, and have been trying to get to the drawing-room ever since." As she spoke, her thought was, "Now it's all over with me. He has got his opportunity, and how can I escape?"

But she mistook him entirely. He was not the man to ask a girl a question he suspected would be painful to her in his own house.

"There are a good many twists and turns," he said, holding the door open for her; "you must come back this way. That staircase leads to the offices."

She walked along rapidly, so as to avoid all unnecessary conversation. "Mamma will wonder what has become of me," she remarked.

He accompanied her in silence until they reached the organ hall, where he stopped, and shaking back his golden hair, said to her, "Miss Radclyffe, will you accept these flowers as a remembrance of a day that has been very pleasant, to me at least?"

What could she do? It seemed ridiculous to refuse so ordinary a gift, yet, if she received it, would it not encourage him to continue his addresses? She had no time to deliberate, and gratitude to him for not having made a second proposal decided her.

"Oh, thank you! What lovely flowers!"

He looked towards the organ. "I should like to be selfish, and ask you to play again," he said doubtfully. "Do you think Mrs. Radclyffe would wait?"

"Oh, no; mamma is in a hurry to go," she exclaimed in alarm. "I'm sorry, but it is too late."

"I suppose it is," he said with a sigh. "I shall live in the hope that you will come another time."

"Thank you for having sung so beautifully," she said, feeling some observation was due. "It is a great treat to hear you."

She regretted the remark the next moment. for his face brightened.

"The merit, if any, was owing to your accompaniment," he returned gallantly, and then they went into the drawing-room, rousing a thrill of joy in Mrs. Radclyffe's maternal breast as she saw them walk in together.

Sir George stood, graceful and picturesque-looking, at the door, to wave a last

adieu as they drove off, the evening wind blowing through his wavy hair and a smile in his sunny blue eyes.

"Well, George," said his sister, coming up and linking her arm in his, "how did you get on? have you made any progress?"

"Not much, Edie, but I had a talk over the matter with Horace."

"What does he say?"

"That he is quite sure it is no use my speaking to her again yet. He says she doesn't want to marry at all." And the young man, being very much in love himself, looked as much amazed as Mrs. Radclyffe had been at such a phenomenon.

"Why not?" inquired his sister.

"He says she has got the idea she is happier single."

"Then it is not, as you feared, that she likes some one else?"

"No; he says he is sure she doesn't, and he thinks she may change her mind if I give her time. I said I was willing to wait as long as she liked, only that I didn't want any one to force her or worry her into it. I don't want a girl against her will. She was in a terrible fright," he went on, laughing, "thinking I should propose to her when I met her just now on the stairs. She need not have been; of course I wouldn't here."

"I wonder why she doesn't want to marry?" said Edythe.

"Well, there are men who prefer a single life, so I conclude there are women who do, too," he answered reflectively.

"I think the wretched life her mother has led has something to do with it as well," returned his sister.

"I shouldn't make her wretched," said he decisively, "if she would only trust me."

"The thing is, dear, she does not care for you, or she would trust you fast enough," with which consoling remark she withdrew.

The next day, when Horace and Blanche had made up their quarrel, he repeated to her the conversation he had had with Sir George, adding that he spoke with the deepest regard and affection about Leila, and vowed he would never marry any one else, only he was very much afraid of her being teased into accepting him.

"I shall not tell mother or Leila," he concluded. "Don't you think it is better not?"

"Yes; it could do no good, and would only make Leila unhappy."

CHAPTER XX.

MR. RADCLYFFE having slaughtered grouse in Scotland to his heart's content, came back to Deerscourt the last week in August "to be even with the partidges." Blanche Seymour had been a month away from home, and was preparing to return to London, but he would not hear of it. He said he had seen nothing of her, and wrote to Mrs. Seymour begging for a reprieve, a proof of his regard on which his wife could not sufficiently descant, "for, my dear, he never by any chance writes a letter almost."

Blanche awaited her mother's reply with more anxiety than she cared to own. Of course she was longing to see her and Mabel; but those rides with Horace were very delightful, the country so lovely, and London in September is acknowledged to be detestable. She felt sorry now she had quarreled so often with him; "he *was* so kind," and resolved not to let herself be provoked again, no matter what he said. Only he had such a power of aggravating her, and used it freely too; and then "he talked such utter nonsense, seeming to fancy a girl ought not to have any will of her own, but just play second fiddle to a man!"

Mrs. Seymour's letter was satisfactory. Her doctor urged a longer sojourn at the sea, so she, rather unwillingly it must be admitted, consented to another fortnight at Deerscourt. Blanche felt a glow of pleasure at the permission of which she was rather ashamed, as if she had done a wrong to her dearly-loved mother and sister. Horace manifested his joy very openly.

"I was in despair, Blanche, thinking we should have no more jolly rides. You and Leila must come out shooting with us. You can come with the lunch, at any rate."

Between his regimental duties and shooting his time was pretty fully occupied, but he contrived to take her for a ride every day, either in the early morning or in the evening.

Besides Mr. Radclyffe and his son, there was another person to whom Blanche's stay was a source of unmixed delight, and that was Emily Peyton. Her life grew more and more lonely, and the young heart pined incessantly for love and sympathy—the air and sunshine of our moral being. She had got into trouble again about her religious opinions. Mr. and Mrs. Millar studied that choice publication, the *Record*, attentively, and

the lady drew her governess's attention to an article denouncing in violent language a movement set on foot for more efficiently ministering to the poorer classes, by a clergyman of High Church views, whom that enlightened and learned journal was pleased to term a Jesuit in disguise. She read the article, and Mrs. Millar asked her if she did not feel "how searching and convincing it was."

"The *Record* would never convince me of anything but its own bigotry and ignorance," was the answer on her tongue, that being a remark Blanche Seymour had made to her a day or two before, but she softened it into, "Don't you think the *Record* is very often one-sided?"

"Truth is ever one-sided," replied Mrs. Millar severely, regardless of that sage who pronounced it to be many-sided; and thereupon followed a lecture on the deadly poison of Tractarianism.

After this Mrs. Millar seriously debated as to whether she did well in keeping such a brand in her house; but it was a trouble to change;—the children liked her, and she was undeniably cheap. She certainly did get the children on. Julia and Kate had made wonderful progress in their music, they were learning to speak French and German capitally, and Johnnie was learning Latin:—all this was not to be lightly thrown away, but she could not and would not be cordial, hardly even courteous, to one who persisted in holding such views, especially after hearing the gospel of Christ so fully and constantly proclaimed in her ear. Not content with treating her as a moral Ishmaelite (being a governess, naturally she was a social one), Mr. and Mrs. Millar now resorted to the singularly unpleasant expedient of expounding and praying at her in their morning and evening "exercises." The family devotions at the Rectory consisted of the reading of a long chapter which Mr. Millar forthwith expounded at great length, the whole concluding with a protracted extempore prayer. No one would be presumptuous enough to pretend to divine the mind of an Evangelical rector's wife on the subject of her husband's *viva voce* expositions of the Scriptures; it may be that her religious tendencies check that disposition to think slightly of her Head's capabilities to be observed in wives of more mundane proclivities; but whatever may have been Mrs. Millar's secret opinion on the matter, there is no doubt that she was the only one of the household who did not,

more or less openly, on a Sunday morning give expression to the thought, "No expounding to-day." Sunday was a day of rest in that respect at least, though two very long sermons in church may, perhaps, be considered to have atoned amply for the respite.

Probably none but those who have themselves been subjected to the ordeal of being expounded and prayed at before the assembled family can fully sympathize with the poor little creature whose feelings were thus daily outraged. It is doubtful how far the servants and children understood many of the allusions, but some they must have perceived, and the suffering was great to the hapless victim in any case. Hers was not one of those buoyant natures which could laugh at the whole thing, feeling that it was beneath anger; she could only endure tenaciously out of the strong love she bore her mother and suffering brother; she was too young yet to be conscious of her own strength, or to know that that same power of endurance is the germ of a character which would ripen into one of the noblest a human being can possess. All this she did not feel. She was only sensible of failure, of being perpetually snubbed and found fault with, her best efforts to please unappreciated; and she was proportionally depressed and humiliated. Her one bright spot was Blanche Seymour's society, and of that she would soon be deprived. The German lessons continued, and now that the weather was cooler, Blanche and Leila joined the Millars in their walks very frequently. One day they found the whole party in great excitement. The Rectory factotum had left the gate leading from the meadow into the garden open, and during the night the cows, following their own sweet wills, had made sad havoc among the flowers, etc. The spectacle that met the eyes of the heads of the household that morning was certainly enough to disturb the equanimity of the most Christian pastor and his helpmeet in England. The kitchen- and flower-garden were a scene of hopeless devastation. The children were loud in their denunciations of "that stupid Tom," and it was evident that the quiet Rectory had been the scene of a domestic storm of no ordinary kind. Emily expressed some surprise to Blanche at the strength of language in which Mr. and Mrs. Millar vituperated the author of the mischief. This same mischief was destined to have an important effect on her life, little as

she thought of it at the time. The delinquent Tom and the housemaid Mary, a remarkably comely young person, were secretly engaged to each other, and the girl was much distressed at the reproaches hurled at her future lord, which she considered needlessly severe.

"They goes on at I ter'ble," was his pathetic lament to the sharer of his griefs.

One morning early Emily went down to the school-room while the aforesaid Mary was cleaning there, and found her in tears.

"What is the matter, Mary?" she inquired sympathizingly.

"Oh, Miss Peyton, Mrs. Millar, she do go on so at poor Tom about that there garden. He didn't do it a purpose, yet they nags at he as if he did."

"Well, Mary, it was a sad misfortune, but when the damage is repaired they will forget it," said Emily, wishing to console the girl without condemning her mistress.

"I'm sure I hopes as they will, Miss Peyton. I think as a lady and gentleman as talks so much about a forgiving of injuries and Christian patience oughtn't to be so 'ard on a haccident. Tom, he says as it seems as if they'd never forget it," she concluded, wiping her eyes indignantly. She could have borne it for herself; but it was hard to see Tom put upon. "Don't you think, Miss, as they might leave off a naggin' at Tom?" she resumed.

Emily expressed a hope that they would soon do so, and went away, thinking no more of the conversation. However, Mr. and Mrs. Millar continued to nag so, as Mary termed it, that the much-enduring Tom gave warning.

Now, Julia Millar had a wild flower-garden which was the delight of her heart, and which she had taken great trouble to make. In all her gardening operations Tom was her right hand, unweariedly good-natured in watering and cherishing her fragile plants and searching out new "weeds" for her, she therefore felt a corresponding gratitude to him. She had, too, a strong sympathy for those whom she thought put upon; she would sometimes try to shield her governess, and to her sister expressed very frankly her opinion that it was not right to allude to her at prayers publicly. Like many other young people, she did not coincide with the parental opinions, and, though as yet undeveloped, her proclivities were decidedly High Church. She had blamed Tom's carelessness in the first annoyance of seeing her garden destroyed, but as

she pithily observed, "it is no use crying over spilt milk," and when he was goaded into giving warning, she said openly that she did not wonder, and that he had been very hardly used; boldly asking Emily if she did not agree with her. Emily mildly observed that "it did seem a pity to have said so much about it." Julia complained so loudly that her mother heard of it, and, of course, rebuked her roundly for presuming to question her parents' conduct.

"Well, mamma, I'm very sorry for Tom, and can't help saying so, and Miss Peyton is too, I'm sure."

"What concern can it be of Miss Peyton's?"

"No concern; but one can be sorry even if a thing doesn't concern one."

"Miss Peyton ought not to have spoken to you on the subject," said Mrs. Millar, her anger completely averted from her daughter to the offending governess.

"She didn't," said Julia bluntly, "only when I said it was a shame that Tom was going, she just said it *was* a pity."

Mrs. Millar said no more to Julia, but sent for Miss Peyton, and demanded sternly how she, as an instructress of youth, ventured to comment to children on their parents' actions?

Not in the least knowing what was meant, the culprit said she never had done so.

"As that is the line you are adopting, I shall speak to Mr. Millar," said the lady in sharp, incisive tones. "The fault is bad enough, but to seek to hide it by a falsehood is to add to it ten-fold."

"Indeed, Mrs. Millar, I don't know what you mean," said the girl, her eyes filling and the blood rushing to her face.

"Remain here till I return," and she flew to fetch her husband, with whom she presently returned.

Mr. Millar was bigoted and narrow-minded, but he was a gentleman; and a feeling of pity shot through his heart as he saw the creature, little more than a child, not much older than his own daughter, standing by the table drooping like a crushed flower in spite of her burning face. Her misery was intense. What had she done? what falsehood had she told?

"Now, Miss Peyton," said Mrs. Millar, in the same unrelenting voice, "perhaps you can justify your conduct to Mr. Millar."

"I don't the least know what I've done," replied the girl, trying hard to restrain her tears.

Mrs. Millar repeated her accusation, adding that Julia was her informant, and that she had good reason to know Miss Peyton did canvass her own and her husband's conduct, as she had heard it from other sources.

Emily felt overwhelmed. The only one to whom she ever spoke of the Millars out of her own family was Blanche Seymour, and it was incredible that her divinity could have betrayed her. The bare idea of such treachery deprived her almost of the power of speech.

"I don't know what Julia can mean," she stammered.

Mr. Millar walked to the window, looking very uncomfortable.

"You had better make Julia come and explain," he said to his wife.

That young lady was summoned, and the housemaid *and* the cook.

A vague terror took possession of Emily's mind. She had never spoken to the cook, and why was she to be called in judgment upon her?

"What is it, mamma?" asked Julia.

"Now, cook, repeat to me what you told me Miss Peyton had said as to Mr. Millar and myself having rebuked Tom for his culpable carelessness."

"Please, ma'am, Miss Peyton didn't say nothing to me," replied the cook, looking greatly alarmed.

"Never mind to whom she said it. What did she say?"

"Please, ma'am, Mary only told me as Miss Peyton said as how it was a shame of you and master to keep on a naggin' perpetual at Tom."

"Mary, did you tell cook so?"

"Please'm, I only said as Miss Peyton was sorry for Tom, and said you oughtn't to say no more about it," and Mary, the housemaid, looked exceedingly compunctious.

"Do you deny this?" asked Mrs. Millar, in an iron voice.

The girl felt covered with confusion. She could not deny that she had once spoken to Mary on the subject, but what she had said she could not recall, though she remembered Mary's remarks.

"I did say something to Mary," she stammered, "but I don't think I can have said it was a shame. I can't exactly remember what I said."

"However, you canvassed our conduct with our servant, and blackened us to her."

"Oh, Mrs. Millar, I did not blacken you, I'm sure."

"You can go," said Mrs. Millar to the

servants. "Now, Julia, what did Miss Peyton say to you about Tom?"

"Mamma, she never said a word of harm to me any more than I believe she did to Mary. I said you and papa scolded Tom too much, and she only said it was a pity, or foolish, I forget which, to keep on at him once you had forgiven him."

"And I think she was right," said Mr. Millar, suddenly turning round, "but you ought neither of you to have discussed the matter."

"Oh, thank you," said Emily, with a rush of gratitude, "then you see I did not blacken you."

"No, no; the servants and Julia have repeated foolish remarks which had better not have been made, perhaps; but you have been more sinned against than sinning, I think."

Emily's head was going round. She tried to recall what she had said to Mary, but a glance at Mrs. Millar's face banished all power of thought.

"You take too lenient a view of the matter," she said to her husband. "It's a serious thing for Miss Peyton to discuss our actions with our children and servants."

"Well, yes; but I don't think any harm was meant, so we will pass it over this time," said he, addressing Emily.

She stood, full of unutterable shame and humiliation, every feeling outraged, not knowing whether to go or stay.

"You can go," said Mrs. Millar, and she flew to her own room and flung herself on her bed in an agony of wretchedness. She tried to think how far she had been wrong; what she had done to be openly taxed with falsehood and no apology offered; but the insult had entered so deeply into her soul—bringing her face to face with the servants as if she had had no feeling of a lady about her—that she was incapable of anything but the wish to throw herself into her mother's arms. She got up, and regardless of lessons, children, everything but her misery, wrote a long letter to Mrs. Peyton detailing the whole circumstance, and pouring out her long-pent-up griefs. She had just finished when there was a knock at her door.

"Miss Peyton," said little Frank Millar's voice, "mamma is very angry that you are not in the school-room; she says it is lesson-time, and you are to come at once."

She went down to the cheerless school-room to struggle with the various tempers of the children, utterly careless of any further blame she might incur. Things

were so bad that they could not be worse.

"Why are you not ready for studies?" inquired Mrs. Millar.

"I forgot," said Emily; "I was writing to mamma."

"To complain, of course," thought Mrs. Millar, but she only said in a tone of studied insolence, "Perhaps you would write your letters at night, and attend to your duties now."

Julia had evidently received a severe lecture. Mrs. Millar sat in the room the whole of lesson-time, and then desired all the children to come away with her, as if Miss Peyton were an unsafe person to leave them with. This style of treatment was henceforth systematically adopted. Mrs. Millar went out walking with them, and when she could not do so, ordered them to amuse themselves in the garden, where they could be under her own eye. This was a double blow. It prevented "Miss Peyton from poisoning the children's minds against their parents," and it effectually put a stop to her intimacy with Blanche Seymour, which Mrs. Millar had long ago discovered was a source of great pleasure. But she could not forbid her to write to her friend, and a long letter penitently confessed to Blanche the momentary doubt her worshiper had entertained of her, and her present distress. She got one in return full of sympathy and consolation; and Mary, housemaid, too, came to her, bathed in tears and full of apologies for having been imprudent enough "ever to say anything to cook; but she never thought as cook would repeat; not as cook meant no harm, neither, and only wanted to say a good word for Tom to missus;" so there was some ray of consolation, and Julia was very affectionate as far as she could be, but it was evident she had been forbidden to speak on the subject. By return of post came a letter from Emily's mother, saying she and her father wished her to tell Mrs. Millar she would leave at Christmas or sooner, if she could find a substitute. They could no longer endure the idea of her misery, "and though you will have trials everywhere, my poor child, still there must be people who will treat you with a little Christian charity, and at all events you ought to have a higher salary. To lead such a life as you do for twenty-five pounds a year is too bad." Captain Peyton wrote to his daughter denouncing the Millars, lamenting her hard fate in having to be a governess, and ordering her to leave at once. No thought

that his own selfishness and imprudence were at the bottom of it all entered his head, neither at that moment did it occur to her, fortunately, perhaps; for what good could it have done her? The consideration of how she was to announce their decision to Mrs. Millar weighed heavily on her, but she bethought herself of Blanche's expedient of writing a note, which she accordingly did and laid it in fear and trembling on that lady's desk. When the children were gone to bed Mrs. Millar went into the school-room.

"Miss Peyton, Mr. Millar and I are quite satisfied with your decision to leave us, and we will release you as soon as I can find a lady to take your place, but we insist on knowing your reason for going."

She spoke in a cold, measured tone which struck a chill to her listener's heart.

"Mamma wishes it," she answered.

"Yes; but your mother must have given you some reason."

A feeling of courtesy made her unwilling to say "Because I am so unhappy here," so, as the least of two evils, she replied hesitatingly, "Mamma wants me to have a higher salary."

Mrs. Millar's face became gray with anger, but she made a strong effort to command herself. "Oh!" she remarked (that wretched interjection can be tortured into implying so much), "but let me tell you, Miss Peyton, you have not been at all badly remunerated for what you do. You are very young and ignorant, and I think you will find a difficulty in meeting people more forbearing to your faults than my husband and I have been. Of course you will understand, after all that has taken place, that I cannot give you a recommendation to any other lady."

The full significance of this Emily did not comprehend, so she merely said, "I will write and tell mamma what you say."

Mrs. Millar took this as a threat, though it was not so intended in the least.

"You can do as you please about that," she answered; "good-night," and she left the room without one relenting or pitying look on her face.

CHAPTER XXI.

EMILY wrote to her mother the result of her communication with Mrs. Millar, and received a letter in return inclosing one to that lady, asking how a recommendation could with any justice be withheld

from her daughter, when she had been willing to keep her with her children, and the girl was leaving solely at her parents' desire. Faults of youth and inexperience she may have been guilty of, but nothing else could be laid to her charge, of that her mother was sure, and they were not a ground for depriving her of the means of earning her daily bread.

"I have written to your mother and told her the truth about you, which apparently she had not heard before, and have explained why I shall steadily decline to recommend you to any one," said Mrs. Millar in an icy voice. She had written, and it was a marvel how any one, herself a mother, could have penned such a letter to another mother about her absent child. Does the fact that a woman must in some degree share her children's love with their governess dry up all the kindly springs of womanly nature towards that unhappy functionary? Mrs. Millar began by saying that evidently Mrs. Peyton had not been correctly informed of all that had taken place, during her daughter's residence under her roof; she spoke strongly of her apathy, ill-temper, sullenness, and finally accused her of gratuitously slandering and blackening herself and her husband to their own children and servants, and then trying to conceal the fault by falsehood. People of less Christian feeling than themselves would instantly have turned her out-of-doors, but they "had not so learned Christ." This being the case, she could not conscientiously recommend Miss Peyton to any mother as a fit companion for her children; but although her reputation was thus blasted, in consideration of her extreme youth, and as themselves consistent followers of Christ, they were willing to give her a chance of retrieving her character, and would themselves keep her for a year or two years longer, and if during that time she conducted herself so as to give them satisfaction, they would then feel justified in giving her a recommendation, but it must be understood that she received only the same salary as heretofore, which was not at all inadequate to her services.

Mrs. Peyton may be forgiven a burst of genuine motherly and womanly anger on reading this shameful production. "How dare any one speak to me of my innocent child's 'blasted reputation' and of giving her 'a chance of retrieving her character'?" she cried, flinging down the letter. She had parted with her child—the delight of her life—the joy of her

heart, compelled thereto by hard necessity and the girl's own wish to add to the family purse. She had sent her forth among strangers, and "her eyes failed with longing for her," and the meagre holidays she received twice a year were *the* events in the mother's life since that bitter parting, for her child was dear to her as were the children of more prosperous mothers to them,—dearer, perhaps, by reason of the poverty and privation which were her lot. But she had reflected that she was letting her go to Christian people, who were themselves parents, and would surely feel for the desolate stranger who came among them. She knew how she would, for the love she bore her own children, have cherished any young creature who came, under such circumstances, into her family. And now she received this letter, which, bad as it was in itself, was ten-fold worse to the mother's heart as showing the nature of the treatment her darling had been enduring for two years. She walked up and down the room, feeling that the Almighty had dealt very bitterly with her. She had read the letter aloud to her second daughter and her crippled son, that darling brother for whose sake Emily had suffered so much. Excepting that one exclamation from herself, there was silence in the room. The grief and indignation were too deep for words, but suddenly a deep sob broke from Archie, and turning she saw him with his face buried in his hands, his body shaken by the force of his emotion. In an instant she and his sister were on their knees by his side. "Archie, darling, don't cry! Oh, Archie, don't, if you don't want to break my heart quite."

A man's grief is always heart-rending to a woman, especially if it breaks out in tears, and the distress Mrs. Peyton felt at witnessing her son's passionate outburst in some measure diverted her mind from its cause. He sobbed violently, and then poured forth a torrent of lamentation and despair at his own helplessness and inability to avenge his sister's wrongs.

"Was there no law," he asked passionately, "by which monsters could be punished who oppressed the helpless in the name of Religion?"

"My darling, if there were twenty thousand laws, I would not have your sister's name dragged into notoriety," replied his mother. "She must come home at once, and then let them do their worst."

She wrote to Mrs. Millar, commenting indignantly on the injustice and inconsistency of her letter, declining her offer, and requesting her to send her daughter home as soon as possible. However, to Emily she said that though Mrs. Millar deserved *no* consideration from her, yet she did not wish to act uncourteously, so she might remain, if she liked, till the latter could find a substitute.

The commotion this letter caused at the Rectory is indescribable. Mr. and Mrs. Millar felt deeply injured. They had shown Christian forbearance and charity, and this was the result. But in the world and from worldlings what other treatment can the followers of righteousness expect (thus modestly they styled themselves)? They were in the world, but not of it; and what fellowship have the children of light with those of darkness?

"I suppose you want to go to-day?" Mrs. Millar asked in freezing tones.

Despair had given Emily boldness. "No; mamma does not wish to be uncourteous, Mrs. Millar. She says I may wait till you can find some one."

"I don't suppose I can get any one under a month."

"Then I will stay a month."

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. SEYMOUR's doctor urged her so strongly not to return to town before the end of September, that he overcame her scruples on the score of expense. Ralph assured her, too, that she might make herself easy: all was going on prosperously. And as she stayed at Bognor, so Blanche stayed at Deerscourt, not at all to her regret, it must be owned.

During the hot August evenings Mrs. Radclyffe had put off dinner to suit the rides, and when Horace and Blanche came home they all lingered out-of-doors till it was too late for anything but bed. But now as the days shortened and they dined at seven, Mr. Radclyffe called on the young ladies for music. Blanche would play willingly and sing with Leila, but from some shyness she could hardly account for she could not sing a solo before Horace. Her voice was a capricious one; even before Mr. Radclyffe she did not sing comfortably; before Horace

she could not get out a note. This was a great grievance to him. "Why should she refuse him a favor she freely granted every one else? She would sing to all those Millar children when they asked her." Thus he complained to Leila, who philosophically observed that no one minded what they did before children.

One night he did not make his appearance in the drawing-room at all after dinner, though when the ladies left it to go to bed he was in the hall to give them their candles.

"Where have you been?" asked Blanche, looking up at him. "We've been wondering what you've done with yourself all the evening."

"As my presence debars you from singing, I kept away to leave you at liberty to do so," he replied in a majestic voice, looking very black.

Tears sprang to her eyes. "How very silly!" she exclaimed indignantly, "and how very unkind! You know I would sing if I could."

"I think the unkindness is on your part," he returned, his face darkening ominously. "You sing to every one but me, though I do all I can to please you."

She drew up her slight figure to its full height, and taking a candle from the table, not from him, swept up-stairs without vouchsafing a reply. What right had he to call her to account for her actions? And how could he be so ungenerous as to reproach her with his kindness? She had not claimed it; in fact, had declined it as far as she could.

"Will you ride to-morrow morning?" he called after her, as she went, stately and graceful in her white dress, up the stairs.

"No, thank you, Colonel Radclyffe, I won't tax your kindness any further. Good-night."

He turned away in deep anger.

"Don't mind his nonsense, dear," said Leila, going into Blanche's room and kissing her.

"Oh, I don't much," said Blanche proudly. "Only, of course, I won't ride with him. The riding was his doing, not mine. I never asked him to do anything to please me; all I wanted was to be left alone."

There was nothing to be said, so after standing silently for some time, watching her as she took off her rings, bracelets, etc., rapidly and nervously, Leila said good-night and left her.

In her boudoir she found Horace very furious, complaining bitterly of Blanche's caprice and willfulness. He had taken

great credit to himself about these morning rides. He had to be in Winterton by ten, and on account of shooting could not go with her in the afternoons, so he proposed that they should breakfast early and ride from eight to half-past nine. She demurred about the trouble, but he assured her he "had squared the cook, who was a good old soul besides, and would do anything for him," and the trio, for Leila joined them, much enjoyed these early repasts. Yet now, after he had done all this, she refused to ride in a fit of temper, and would not be obliging enough to sing when he asked her. "All women are just alike," was his indignant and novel conclusion after he had fumed for some time.

"She'll be all right again to-morrow," said Leila soothingly, feeling he could not be more angry if it were Alice Wentworth.

"So she might, for aught he cared," he declared with a furious expletive. "Nothing would ever induce him to ride with her again."

A quarrel is mostly amusing to the lookers-on, and Leila could hardly help laughing as she saw Horace and Blanche meet the next morning with stately dignity. Blanche's *anger* had passed off, but she was very much hurt, and her color heightened unusually as she returned his ceremonious greeting. He was still very irate, and showed his wrath by being elaborately polite and attentive.

"Well, Blanche," said Mr. Radclyffe, "how did you enjoy your ride?"

"I didn't ride this morning," she replied, flushing again.

"Halloo! why not? I thought you always rode. You and Horace seem to enjoy getting up with the cocks."

"I have ridden till to-day," she said coldly.

Mrs. Radclyffe looked dreadfully alarmed. Horace's and Blanche's quarrels distressed her almost as much as Leila's refusal to marry. Mr. Radclyffe glanced at his son's face, and seeing the cloud there, prudently held his tongue.

"What is it, Leila?" inquired Mrs. Radclyffe after breakfast. "Why have they quarreled? Won't they ever speak to each other again?" She always jumped to the most doleful conclusions.

"I think Horace is very stupid," said Leila angrily. She resented his conduct for Alice Wentworth's sake.

The following afternoon, as the two girls were walking in the shrubbery they met Horace with his gun on his shoulder.

"Why are you back so soon?" inquired Leila.

"The birds are so small one might as well be shooting sparrows, so we came home. I'm going after a rabbit. Will you come?" He spoke to Leila, but glanced at Blanche. Since their quarrel they had been frigidly dignified to each other. The two girls turned with him, and he went on to tell them of his day's sport in his natural way. Blanche made an effort to speak as usual.

"Is your gun loaded?" she asked, by way of saying something.

"Yes; are you afraid?" eagerly turning to her. "I'll unload it if you are."

"By no means," and she laughed. "I only asked out of idle curiosity. I was calculating that rabbit's chances of escape."

"They are not many once I catch a sight of him, though our talking is not much in my favor. I saw a squirrel to-day which I could have shot," he went on, lowering his voice and looking at her; "but I did not, though you have not kept your part of the compact."

"What? I don't remember."

"You promised to leave off calling me Colonel Radclyffe if I didn't shoot them,—a promise you have not kept."

"Do you ever miss when you fire?" she asked, with a peep out of her dark eyes at his face, and as if unheeding his remark.

"Very often, Miss Seymour," he answered gravely. She and Leila laughed.

"What bird is that?" and she looked at one soaring high in the air.

"A wood-pigeon."

"Could you shoot it if you tried?"

For all answer he raised his gun, and the bird fell fluttering almost at her feet. Tears of pity and anger rushed to her eyes.

"What *made* you do that?" flashing indignant surprise at him. "How could you kill the poor harmless bird?"

"Why, I thought you asked me if I could?" he exclaimed, overwhelmed at the expression on her face.

"But I did not ask you to do it. I suppose if I said, 'could you shoot my head off?' you *wouldn't* do it."

"I should be sorry to destroy the most beautiful thing God ever made," he answered gravely. "I concluded you wished me to shoot the bird."

"How could you think I wanted to see anything killed?"

"You knew I was going to shoot a rabbit."

"I should not have seen you do it. Besides, I supposed you wanted it. It was wanton cruelty to kill this poor bird,—it enjoyed its innocent life, and is no use to any one dead."

"Wood-pigeon soup is the best thing out," he exclaimed eagerly, as if that statement must mitigate her anger.

She turned away, shaking her head, to drive back the tears. He went up to her. "Blanche, upon my soul, I didn't mean to vex you. I thought you wanted to see if I could bring it down. And Blanche," he went on pleadingly, and with a boyish pride in his skill, "it was a good shot. Look!" and he took up the bird; "it is quite dead; it didn't suffer."

"Never mind. It was my fault. I ought not to have drawn your attention to it."

This assumption that he must needs wish to kill *every* flying thing he saw was too much for him, and he walked on in silence.

"How could I tell she would be so angry, and cry?" he observed wonderingly to Leila afterwards. "I made sure she wanted to see me shoot it."

Warned by the voices, the rabbit warily kept out of the way, so Blanche's nerves were spared any further shock. Horace carried the deceased bird. When they got home he said, "Blanche, I should like to convince you that a dead wood-pigeon is worth something. I'll have this made into soup, and you will see how good it is."

"Poor bird! I feel its death on my conscience."

The next morning early Leila went into Blanche's room.

"Blanche dear," waking her. "Horace has just asked me to bring you this note." It was written in pencil in Horace's scrawling hand.

"MY DEAR BLANCHE:

"Will you come for a ride this morning? I apologize for what I said that vexed you. I did not mean it.

"Your affectionate

"HORACE."

Blanche was very sleepy, but this woke her effectually.

"Tell him I'll come," she said smiling. "Quarreling is a bore, and I'm glad to make it up again."

"What did she say?" asked Horace, who was waiting for the answer.

Leila repeated. "So it is," said he; "an awful bore. Then I'll order breakfast and the horses."

Blanche went down to the dining-room looking fresh and bright, in her habit. She had been really unhappy at having offended Horace, and at what she considered a reproach on his part; but now that the quarrel was over she could not but laugh at the whole thing. He was in the room waiting for her, and came forward at once, taking her hand in his strong grasp.

"Blanche, it is very kind of you to forgive me. I'm sorry I said a word to hurt you. I didn't mean it in the way Leila says you took it."

"I'm glad of that," she answered frankly; "it hurt me very much when I thought so. I was very cross, too, and I'm sorry. I will try to sing, as you wish it so much."

She colored deeply as she made this last remark, lowering her eyes and withdrawing her hand which he was still holding.

"No, Blanche; I'll never say another word about it, as you dislike it."

"Horace, you mistake quite. It is that I can't sing before strangers."

"Only I'm not a stranger."

"Well, no; but I'm not used to singing before you. However, it does look ill-natured, I confess, so I'll do my best, and if I sing badly, you know, you will only have yourself to blame."

"Your singing badly would be like 'sweet bells jangled,'" he said, in his soft voice.

"Why, Horace, how long have you taken to Shakspeare?"

"Well, what was a fellow to do if you would not speak to him?"

In the evening Blanche made a heroic effort, and sang several songs, rather tremulously, perhaps, but not the less to Horace's delight. He was enchanted, and detained her as he was giving her her candle to thank her, less by words than by that manner of his, so infinitely more expressive.

And Blanche went to bed feeling supremely happy. No such vague terrors haunted her pillow that night, as when she and Mabel lay tremblingly talking of the Patriarch's vision. Yet she would have been safer under her mother's wing, than sinking to sleep to dream of Horace's soft words and gay smile, and waking with the delicious consciousness that she was going for a ride with him.

And Horace? Well, he certainly ought to have been with Alice Wentworth at Wortham Park.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mrs. MILLAR had got a governess, and informed Miss Peyton she was at liberty to go the last week in September.

Emily used to sit in the lonely school-room and wonder what her successor would be like. Would she be as miserable as she had been? or would she be so much cleverer and stronger, that she would bear the desolation and repression without shrinking?

Mrs. Millar had so contrived that she and Blanche Seymour had had no opportunity of seeing each other comfortably lately, but when she heard her successor was coming, she said plainly she would like to call at Deerscourt and say good-by to Miss Seymour and Miss Radclyffe, who had been very kind to her.

To this Mrs. Millar could make no objection. Indeed, whether from some feeling of compunction now that her victim was about to escape her, or from the idea that she was forgiving her enemy, she grew, the last week, quite warm and affectionate in her manner, inquired something about Emily's family, and spoke with compassion of her extreme youth, urging it as an excuse for some of her shortcomings. A little of this kindness of manner, for it went no further, shown sooner would have helped the young pilgrim wonderfully on her way. Now it came too late. Mrs. Millar resembled those excellent husbands who make their wives' lives wretched, and hurry them into their graves, and then erect costly tombs, and mourn for them with all the outward "trappings and suits of woe," and the world says, "What devotion!" There was an extra refinement of cruelty, too, for she never relented in her intention of withholding the voucher as to character which would insure the girl employment in some other educational tread-mill.

Emily called at Deerscourt the afternoon before she was to return home. She and Blanche talked the matter over, and their conclusion was that in the end Mrs. Millar would not refuse a recommendation; which showed how little they knew her.

"I'm going away myself next week," said Blanche; "I wish you had been staying a few days longer, and we could have gone part of the way together."

"I shall travel second class," said Emily, coloring.

"As far as money goes, I think I ought too; only I suppose mamma wouldn't like it."

And with many *adieux* and promises of eternal friendship they parted, Blanche having, in her mother's name, given a cordial invitation to the little outcast to come and see her if she visited London.

That night Mrs. Millar presented Emily with a book bearing the ominous title—"Haste for thy Life, or Tractarianism unmasked," it being an earnest appeal to all who valued their souls or their bodies either, in fact—this last may have been in allusion to fasting—to purge themselves from the deadly poison of this upas-tree which was destroying the Church of England. Mrs. Millar said she hoped it would recall to her mind the pure gospel which she had heard preached while under her roof.

The next day they parted, never to meet again till they stood where each would have to render up the great account. Mrs. Millar kissed her, Judas-like, meditating the while that fatal blow to all her prospects. She was sorry to quit the children, Julia especially, when it came to the point; but oh, the joy of throwing herself into her mother's arms! of hearing those cheerful, familiar home voices!

Her two years of suffering had not procured Archie his piano, as she lamented in tears to him, nevertheless they were not thrown away. No life-discipline is, however little we may see its effects.

"But, oh, mamma, it felt so odd when she kissed me! I didn't know what to make of it; only, somehow, I wish she hadn't."

"My own darling, she's a wicked, bad, unchristian woman!" said Mrs. Peyton, indignantly. "Think no more of her, and we will see if we can't get on without your having to go from home again."

The following week Horace took Blanche up to London. Her departure was deeply regretted, but Mrs. Seymour was peremptory in her desire to have her home. Horace was going to Wortham, and had just discovered that the nearest way was through London. He dined with the Seymours every day while he remained in town—Mrs. Seymour could not do less than ask him, though his intimacy with Blanche made her very uneasy. Yet there was nothing tangible to take hold of. He spoke openly and constantly of his intended marriage, and it was arranged that Mabel and Blanche were to be Alice's bridesmaids.

Nor was there anything in Blanche's manner to warrant her fears. She appeared as frank and as much at her ease

with Horace as with Ralph or Geoffrey, spoke of him and to him without embarrassment, and seemed to think no more of his coming than of any one else's.

She alluded to the letter her mother had written, blushing, indeed, as she did so, but otherwise freely enough.

"She's all right, mamma," said Mabel. "It is Horace. The sooner he betakes himself to his Alice the better. A man ought to be content with one Phyllis at a time."

He did betake himself to her at the end of the week. After he had been at Wortham a few days, he wrote to Blanche, giving a sad report of his *fiancée* and her father. Sir Henry was in constant pain, very irritable, never easy if his daughter was out of his sight, and the anxiety and unceasing exertion were seriously affecting her health. She looked wretchedly ill, and had a bad cough, which, however, she assured him proceeded from fatigue. He wrote with affection and good feeling about her, and said he thought his arrival had cheered her up a little.

Blanche showed this letter unreservedly at breakfast.

"It will be a bad look-out for Horace if she goes off the hooks," said Ralph; "she has a precious lot of tin."

"It would be a bad look-out in every way, independently of the tin," said Blanche.

He shrugged his shoulders. "He's one of your heroes, I perceive, Blanche, so I'll say nothing."

"He is very fond of her," said Blanche, ruffling her feathers; "he is always writing to her, and he speaks most affectionately of her, doesn't he, mamma?"

"Yes, dear, I thought so."

"Of course he does," said Ralph. "She will have eight thousand pounds a year."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MRS. PEYTON said they would try to manage that Emily should not leave home again; and they did try, but they were sorely pressed for money. It is so hard sometimes to keep the wolf from the door.

Captain Peyton's farming succeeded even less than his other speculations. The eldest son—after the fashion of his kind—was a drag on them, rather than a help; there were no means of educating

the younger children; Archie grew daily a greater sufferer, sadly in need of comforts which his mother's and sisters' hearts bled to see him want. Certainly Emily had not earned much, but it was something, and it made one less at home. Her father said nothing, but she always fancied he grudged her presence; and though her mother assured her it was not so, she could not divest herself of the feeling.

It was suggested that she should try daily teaching in the neighboring town, but only the youthful shop-keepers seemed to desire instruction, and great as was the misery of her life at Deerscourt Rectory, it was paradisiacal compared to the essence of Philistinism and vulgarity she encountered in endeavoring to impart knowledge to the few pupils she had succeeded in getting. Besides, the walks to and from the town, and the long fasts she had to undergo, told on her health, and her mother insisted on the plan being abandoned.

Does any one ever picture to themselves the tortures endured by a mother, condemned to see her helpless daughters, delicately nurtured, tenderly loved, driven to pass their lives in the awful, hopeless drudgery of governessing? *They* may suffer, and do, but they have hope and the glorious heritage of youth on their side, while she—she sits at home and eats her soul out with eager, longing, restless, yearning love, love that pines to gather her nurslings under her wings and cannot—love that is “sick, and capable of fears” for her absent ones. “My darlings! my darlings! I would help you if I could,” is the ceaseless cry of her aching heart.

“We talk of human life as a journey, but how variously is that journey performed! There are some who come forth girt and shod and mantled to walk on velvet lawns and smooth terraces, where every gale is arrested and every beam is tempered. There are others who walk on the Alpine paths of life, against driving misery and through stormy sorrows, over sharp afflictions; walk with bare feet and naked breast, jaded, mangled, and chilled.”*

Mrs. Peyton had never heard of the *Wimin's Rites Bizness*—that phase of the world's progress not having manifested itself in her day—but she would have advocated women's rights or women's anything else that would have opened a prospect to Emily of gaining a living without being exposed to the tender mercies of

another Mrs. Millar. As it was, there was nothing for it but to try her fortune in some other family. But how to do so without a recommendation? Advertisement after advertisement was answered, and a correspondence would go on satisfactorily till a reference was asked for, and then all fell through. Both Captain and Mrs. Peyton wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Millar, but they maintained a persistent silence, never replying to any letter they got on the subject.

It was a time of heart-sickening despair to the poor victim;—the hope deferred, which wears out the spirit of the young, who have yet to learn how delusive our hopes usually are, was doing its work. The sweet, childish face grew sadder every day; she pined and drooped like a withering flower, and became possessed with the idea that “they (meaning her family) must in their hearts think she had done something very wrong to be so treated.”

“My child, my child!” exclaimed her mother, “how can I think so, when I have the woman's letter to myself showing me what she is! Her motive is plain enough. She would take you back to-morrow if I would let you go. You suited her, and she would keep you at any cost. Where can she find any one to teach what you did for twenty-five pounds a year?”

Mrs. Peyton was probably right in her surmise, but it could give no comfort to the poor disappointed girl as she lost every fresh chance.

London is the great refuge for the destitute both morally and physically, and Captain Peyton was sure if Emily only went there she would have a greater likelihood of succeeding.

The mother said that she must have change of some sort, so wrote to a cousin living at Kensington asking her to receive her for a little while. Her father took her up to town.

“My dear, don't fret,” said the kind-hearted old maiden cousin, whose life was spent in solacing the miserable, “we will soon find something for you to do. Come, cheer up! One must not make up one's mind to be miserable at nineteen.”

But experience soon showed the difficulties of the position. Emily saw lady after lady, “went to be looked at,” as she termed it, told her story, and all declined her services, some courteously, some abruptly, some rudely, as if she had done them an injury by troubling them.

And these women were not to be

* Sydney Smith.

blamed. They were mothers to whom the welfare of their children was the great object of life, and how could they trust them to one whom another mother, no doubt equally anxious as themselves, refused to certify as fit for the charge? The woman who would have given her a trial, under such circumstances, must have been very large-hearted or have possessed enormous faith in her own power of discrimination.

Emily had written to Blanche on her arrival in town, and had been several times to see her. The Seymours interested themselves immensely about her, making great efforts to obtain her a situation, but they had no friends wanting a governess. The children of their acquaintances were all babies or grown up.

Geoffrey Rivers did his utmost, too, and made his mother write everywhere in her behalf, but with no result.

"Would she do for my school-mistress, Blanche?" he inquired one day, half laughing. "I want one badly."

"My dear Geof! how could she be your school-mistress? She is a lady. If you could see her, you would perceive that she is anything but fit for it?"

"It's a great nuisance my school-mistress wanting to get married, isn't it, Blanche?"

"Well, I suppose it is to you, though probably she doesn't think so."

"I declare I hoped your friend would have done for me. I was thinking of the plan all the way as I came here."

"Geoffrey!"

"Oh! I say, Blanche, I saw such a pretty girl in the Park to-day! I was walking across, and she didn't see me, nor I her, till she nearly ran into my arms. I haven't seen so pretty a girl for a long time, saving of course you and Mabel." (She bowed ceremoniously.) "She had a bright color and such a pair of dark brown eyes, only they were full of tears."

"At having nearly knocked you down, I suppose!"

"Nonsense. When I took off my hat to apologize I saw she was crying. Young ladies should not go about in tears, making a fellow feel so queer."

"Poor thing! I wonder what was the matter?"

"He had behaved badly, I've no doubt," he returned laughing, "or had not written."

"Geoffrey, I believe you fancy a woman can never be unhappy except about a man."

"Pretty much so, Blanche. You will find a man some way at the bottom of most women's troubles."

"You and Horace Radclyffe think the world all man. Was your lachrymose beauty a lady?"

"Yes. She had pretty feet, too. I wonder, now, why she was crying?"

"Really, Geof, I would tell you if I could. You will have to put an advertisement in the *Times*,—'If the young lady who was in tears on Tuesday last in Hyde Park, and ran against a gentleman, tall and *bien barbé*, will communicate with him she will be conferring a great favor. Address G. R.'"

"I think I'll do it. I should like uncommonly to see her again."

A few days after this Emily Peyton came to call. She was even in worse plight than usual, and poured out a melancholy story of disappointed hope. She had seen a lady who had been much prepossessed in her favor.

"I like your face," she said bluntly.

"You look a good girl, and I judge a great deal from that; besides, you are bright and pretty, and I like to have pretty people about me, but I can't promise to take you till I see my husband. You know it's a risk, my dear; you will excuse my saying so, and then if I took you without his advice and anything went wrong, he would be sure to say, 'I told you so.' That's a way men have, my dear."

The result of the conversation was a note asking Emily to call. She did so, full of hope.

"My dear, I asked you to come, because it is sometimes easier to speak than write. I am very sorry, but my husband strongly advises me not to take you, as this lady won't give you a recommendation. Now, if I wrote to her, do you think she would answer the letter?"

Emily feared not, but it could do no harm to try. She was most kind, offering luncheon, which the girl was too sick at heart to eat. She left the house feeling utterly cast down. That morning she had received a letter informing her that as Mrs. Millar had not written the lady must, with regret, consider the negotiation at an end.

"And, Miss Seymour, what am I to do? What can I do?" And she burst into tears. "No one will have me."

"Indeed, dear, I don't know. Mamma says it is the most wicked thing she ever heard. Do you tell them the whole story?"

"I tell them all I can, but there isn't much to tell. No one cares for the domestic affairs of the Millars, and when I have told them they evidently think there is something more behind."

"Well, don't cry, dear. Come down to lunch, and we will talk it over again with mamma and Mabel."

Emily wiped her eyes. She was not given to shed torrents of tears, but now large, heavy drops were wrung from her by her keen misery.

"I'm afraid I look very untidy," said she, trying to smooth her rebellious, curly brown hair. "I did not mean to stay to lunch."

"You look very nice, and there is no one there. Perhaps my Cousin Geoffrey may come in, but he wouldn't know whether you were tidy or not."

In which statement Blanche was quite mistaken. Geoffrey had a very keen eye for all that appertained to a woman's appearance.

After lunch Mabel and Emily went up to the drawing-room, and thinking Mrs. Seymour and Blanche were following, left the door open and sat down by the fire. They were so engaged in talking that they did not hear a man's step come up the stairs, stop short at the door, and then go down again quickly. It was Geoffrey Rivers.

He broke abruptly into the dining-room, startling Mrs. Seymour and Blanche who were still there.

"Blanche, if there isn't my errant damsel in the drawing-room, and in tears again."

"Geoffrey! how you startled us! There's no one in the drawing-room but Mabel and Miss Peyton."

"But, Aunt Fanny! Blanche! it's the young lady I saw in the Park," he explained, in great excitement.

Blanche had forgotten the circumstance, and Mrs. Seymour had never heard it.

"It's the same, I know," he went on eagerly; "but is she always crying? Don't you remember, Blanche? you told me to put an advertisement in the *Times*."

"Then it must have been Miss Peyton! how very curious!" And she related the poor little thing's last trouble. He was marvelously full of sympathy and interest, and it is sad to have to record that he made the illiberal remark that "no better conduct was to be expected from Evangelicals."

It is true he had been interested in Emily before, but that was as a Christian. She had been an abstract idea. Now that

he had seen the idea in flesh and blood, and in a very prepossessing form, his Christian charity received a wonderful impulse.

"You had better come up and see if she will do for your school," said his aunt.

"Oh, that was only nonsense, of course," said he rather shortly.

"My dear," said Mrs. Seymour, "this is my nephew, Mr. Rivers. I dare say you have heard Blanche speak of him."

Emily had wiped away her tears, but her dark eyes looked larger and more lustrous than ever with unshed ones as she raised them to Geoffrey's kindly face.

"Miss Peyton, I must apologize for having nearly knocked you over the other day in the Park," he said; "I was walking stupidly on and did not see you."

"Was it you?" she asked solemnly. "I think it was as much my fault as yours, or more."

"Not at all. I told Blanche I had nearly bowled a young lady over. I had no idea it was you."

The dark eyes went up again to his face; he was very tall, she rather short. "I should not have recognized you again; I was so ashamed of my stupidity I hardly saw you."

This was not very gratifying; but he forgave it in consequence of the perturbation of mind she had been in. Blanche satisfied his curiosity by asking Emily why she had been crying. It was the usual thing—a lady who would have taken her but for the want of reference.

"So you see, Geoffrey, it was not a *he* this time."

"Poor little thing! what a scandalous shame it is!" he said quite gravely. "Must she be a governess, Blanche?"

"She must do something to earn money, and what else can she do?"

"I always thought your cousin, Mr. Rivers, was a clergyman," said Emily, solemnly, to Blanche afterwards.

"So he is. You don't think he looks like one, I suppose?"

"Well, not much. I mean, clergymen don't generally have beards and moustaches."

"No; but Geoffrey always takes a line of his own. Don't you think him very handsome?"

"Very," she answered gravely; and then her mind went back to her troubles.

CHAPTER XXV.

It was close to Christmas. Things went on pretty much the same in Cadogan Place. Ralph became more and more tenacious of question respecting their finances, but there was always money forthcoming if he was asked for it, though he began to object to little expenses in the house, and took the payment of the bills into his own hands to a degree Blanche did not at all approve.

Horace Radclyffe came to call every day during his stay in town, on his way from Deerscourt to Wortham to spend Christmas with Alice Wentworth. He said Leila was very dull, and wanted Blanche to cheer her up. He had frequently met Sir George Conway out hunting, and had been to shoot at Leighton several times, but there had been no communication between the ladies. Miss Conway and Lady Eveleigh were gone back into Devonshire. He brought many urgent messages from his mother begging that Blanche would go to Deerscourt for Christmas: but to this Mrs. Seymour would by no means consent, nor was Blanche at all desirous to go, for the household in Cadogan Place was much excited on the subject of Geoffrey Rivers.

For some time past that young man's proceedings had been a source of great mystery at first, and amusement afterwards, to his belongings.

After his introduction to Miss Peyton he became restlessly eager in his inquiries after her, and whenever she visited the Seymours, which was very often, he was there, in order, he remarked casually, to see her safe home. He lent her books and suggested the theatre, so as to amuse her. He got Blanche to take her to call on his mother, and was nervously anxious to know the result of the interview.

"Did mother like her? didn't she think her pretty?"

Yes: Mrs. Rivers had liked her extremely. Who could see the sweet young face with its sad look, and not like her?

"Aunt Eleanor was as dear and kind as she always is, and kissed her and promised to do all she could to help her," said Blanche.

Then there were mysterious conferences between Mrs. Rivers and Mrs. Seymour, and finally one day Geoffrey asked Blanche abruptly if she thought her friend would consent to become his wife.

"Ask her, dear Geoffrey," suggested Blanche.

"But what do you think yourself, Blanche?"

"I could not give you an idea. Such a thought has, I'm convinced, never entered her head."

The question did not surprise Blanche. It was barely three weeks since he had seen Emily, but his behavior during that time was such as to convince the beholders that in spite of his valorous anti-matrimonial protestations "the sweet youth" was envious of Benedick's condition. He was as erratic, original, and vehement in his love as in everything else, and his whole soul was set now on having Emily for his wife. With his accustomed candor he opened his mind to his parents after his mother had seen Emily, and though he said he would not marry without their consent he earnestly besought them to grant it, assuring them in enthusiastic terms of the young lady's perfections, and of the utter impossibility of his ever liking any other woman.

Mr. and Mrs. Rivers were old-fashioned, unworldly people, not unmindful of the good things of this life when they came naturally in their way, nor regardless of the advantages of a wealthy connection for their son; but his happiness was, above everything, their object, and though they must certainly have wished him to marry otherwise, they would not oppose him in this thing on which his heart was set, nor would they lessen the value of the favor by granting it grudgingly.

Having obtained his parents' consent, the next thing was to get the young lady's. He would like to have made Blanche ask the question, but on reflection, he decided to do it himself, for though he had no idea what to say, yet he thought his love's face at that moment would be a beautiful sight, and would, besides, give some clue to her real feelings, for his mother had not failed to warn him of the danger that she would accept him as the solution of all her difficulties, irrespective of her sentiments towards him. So he decided to do the work himself instead of by proxy, though the *how* and *when* caused him great perplexity.

"It is a bore, Blanche, having to propose," he remarked, to the faithful recipient of all his confidences.

"Well, yes; I think if I were a man I should hate it. It must be so humiliating to be refused."

"Then you think she will refuse me?" he said in alarm.

"By no means, dear old Geof! I was only speaking in a general way, and supposing I were a man."

"When is she coming here again?"

"To-morrow. She is coming to lunch and we are going to see some pictures."

"May I come too?"

"Of course. Mamma asked her on purpose. She says you ought to see more of her before you take such an important step."

"Oh, I have quite made up my mind. She suits me down to the ground. Don't you agree, Blanche, that she is, in every way, charming?"

Blanche did agree.

"And she will be a good parson's wife, don't you think, Blanche? Why, her face is like one of Mozart's Masses embodied!"

"Geoffrey, you are growing quite poetical."

"But don't you see what I mean? She looks so noble and good. It makes one better even to look at her." And much more to the same effect, to all of which Blanche listened with commendable gravity, sincerely delighted at her little friend's happy prospects, and feeling sure, too, that her cousin would have a sweet, tender wife. They all took Emily's consent for granted except Geoffrey himself. He was unwontedly nervous and self-distrusting. He was in the habit of preaching to, and presiding among, any number of young ladies, Sunday-school teachers and District Visitors, and his modesty had not at all stood in his way, but now he was too much in earnest to be confident.

Emily arrived the following day more than usually depressed. She had been again disappointed about an engagement, and had had a very bad account of Archie that morning. She hardly ate any lunch, and went up to the drawing-room feeling so tired that she wondered how she should ever reach the picture-gallery.

Since Geoffrey had taken the whole house into his confidence, his aunt and cousins always left him, what they considered a reasonable time, alone with Emily whenever they met. The sad face and drooping figure at lunch had so affected his kind heart that he resolved to put his fate to the touch directly after, and with amusing *naïveté* went to Blanche and begged her not to let any one come and interrupt him. Highly diverted, she promised to keep guard.

His following her did not surprise Emily. She had been very shy with him at first, but the feeling was beginning to wear off, though such an idea as his

being her suitor had never for a moment occurred to her. She was one of those girls, far more numerous than people suppose, utterly unconscious of their own power or attractions. When the old cottage women, round her home, prayed Heaven to bless "her bonny face," she attributed it to their politeness or their gratitude for the gifts which her mother, even from her own necessity, never failed to distribute to her suffering neighbors. Except mechanically, and to see that her hair was tidy, she never looked at herself in the glass. Life was too serious a matter to her for such girlish indulgences; she simply never thought of dress or ornament or beauty,—they were for the happy and prosperous,—even her youth, that rich inheritance, was to her merely a drawback, the reason given for refusing her more than twenty-five pounds a year. What advantage was youth to her? How thankfully would she have exchanged her nineteen years for fifty or sixty could she thereby have earned a corresponding number of pounds! Every old and middle-aged woman she saw was an object of innocent envy to her. Neither had she ever thought of marriage. It was not that she said to herself, as some girls do, "I am not likely to marry," but the idea never suggested itself to her. Her destiny was to work, and suffer, and love with passionate devotion all her own family, and no other ever presented itself to her imagination. And to this Sleeping Beauty, whom the Prince's kiss was to waken into a new and brighter life, came Geoffrey Rivers this frosty December morning, much pondering how he was to declare the love and pity of which his heart was full.

"O eyes, long laid in happy sleep!
O happy sleep, that lightly fled!
O happy kiss, that woke thy sleep!
O love, thy kiss would wake the dead."

He had rehearsed to himself many little touching and tender speeches for the occasion, but somehow the sight of that sad, sweet face put them all out of his head—put everything out of it but the wish to take the little thing in his arms and comfort her, which, however, he felt would be, perhaps, too striking a demonstration just at first.

She was sitting in a low chair by the fire, when he went in. He took up his position by the chimney-piece, and leaning his elbow on it, stood looking at her for a minute. Then, suddenly—"Miss Peyton, will you think me very pre-

sumptuous if I tell you, after so short an acquaintance, that I love you very much?"

She looked up at him, not taking in his meaning. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Rivers, I did not understand."

This was terrible. He repeated, coming nearer, "Miss Peyton, I love you with all my heart. Can you love me a little in return?"

"Do you mean that you want me to marry you?" she asked, sitting up.

"I do. Will you be my wife?"

The whole thing was so new an experience to her that she hardly blushed. That vivid color which Geoffrey expected to see flush her face never came, but she raised her dark, lustrous eyes to his, and said: "Mr. Rivers, I like you very much because you are Blanche's cousin, and because you have been kind to me,—so kind, since I have known you,—but I don't think I like you well enough to be your wife; besides, I can't, because I want to earn some money to help mamma." And tears sprang to her eyes as she remembered how impossible she found it to get the means to do so.

"Don't cry, poor little thing, don't cry," he exclaimed. "Just tell me one thing,—don't you think you could get to like me more? I would wait any time."

"I like you now," she said simply, but this time blushing, though she did not half understand all his face said, "only not enough to be your wife. It wouldn't be right to marry you, would it, unless I liked you very much?" Geoffrey was morally convinced at that moment that he had to do with an angel in human shape.

"Oh, Miss Peyton, you like me quite enough. I'm content, and if you will be my wife, that will end all your troubles, and I will take such care of you, and my mother will be so good to you, and fond of you."

"But do you know how poor I am?" she asked. "Papa has very little money and has a great many children."

"I don't care about that. I have enough for both of us. And how glad your mother will be to think you are happy with me in a home of your own!" This was a new view of the case, and she raised her eyes again, as if to be sure he meant it all.

"I'm such a poor little thing for you to want to marry," said she, looking at the splendid face and figure before her.

He was by her side in an instant, and took her two hands. His chivalrous sense of honor forbade any further demonstra-

tion, till her parents' consent was obtained. It was an old world prejudice he had as to the respect and reverence due to her youth and womanhood.

"You are the dearest little thing in all the world to me, and I love you better than my life."

"Are you sure you mean it; that you won't be sorry afterwards? Did you say your mother would like me?"

He protested and vowed, and swore, as men do on these occasions.

"And on her lover's arm she leant,
And round her waist she felt it fold,
And far across the hills they went,
In that new world which is the old."

This is metaphorical, for he did not put his arm round her, but he sat down by her and reassured her, and told her all his plans and hopes, and all idea of picture-seeing was given up for that day.

"Mr. Rivers, what will Mrs. Seymour and Blanche say?"

"That you must not call me Mr. Rivers. You must call me Geoffrey, and I will call you Emily. I think it is the sweetest name in the world. I hope you think Geoffrey rather a good name?"

"I do. I think it's lovely."

"Well, that's all right. I suppose we ought to call Blanche." He did so, and when she came, looking properly demure, he said joyfully,—"Blanche, she wanted an engagement, and now she has engaged herself permanently to me." And when Mrs. Seymour and Mabel came, they all cried and laughed and embraced each other together.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN they had all subsided to a moderate extent, Geoffrey took his love home to her cousin's abode in Kensington. They met the old lady at the door, just returning from her labors among the poor; and Geoffrey, never very reticent, made her *au fait* of the position before they got into the house. She assured him he need have little fear of obtaining Captain and Mrs. Peyton's consent, a fear which, it may be suspected, the young man did not entertain very strongly. When they got into the drawing-room, and she had freed herself from her cloak, she almost took Emily in her arms, as she would a baby, "My poor little lamb! So your troubles are ended, for the present

at least, though I don't say you will never have any more; I told you to cheer up and God would help you, though that nasty, wicked woman and her horrid husband used you so shamefully."

Geoffrey's father, a few years before, had built him a church in one of the poorest parts of the East End of London, and here he labored, often "in painfulness and weariness," amid much opposition, both active and passive, with the zeal of an apostle. Frequently, as he saw how little visible result of his labors there was, he felt desponding enough, but "God weigheth more with how much love a man worketh than how much he doeth. He doeth much that loveth much," and Geoffrey was not the best judge of the effects of his own work. The old looked askance at first at his novel services, his music and flowers; but he caught the young. No boy or girl was ever found to resist that genial smile or pleasant, kindly voice. He had organized a sort of lay Sisterhood (all this in the days when such things were very new), the somewhat conventual garb of whose members was a terrible stone of stumbling to the faithful even of St. Hilda's, but he went on his way and at last lived down opposition. He did not reside in his district. He was the only child of his mother, and though she was not a widow, still her life, and her husband's too, would have lost much of its charm had they not had their son in the house with them, so he went to his work daily, returning to make glad their hearts.

Now he was all eagerness to take Emily to assist in decorating his church, and show her his schools, Home, and all his district machinery. Would she come with him to-morrow?

Happiness was such a novel sensation to her that she could not realize it. It has been said that "joy's excess is near akin to bitterness." Her sweet nature could not cherish a bitter feeling, but she could not at once shake off the *habit* of depression. She moved about like one in a dream, and the thought which kept on recurring like the refrain of some song, was—"then, I suppose, I needn't be a governess any more." And there came a vague feeling that it had all happened before in some far-off time, or to some one else, not to her, Emily Peyton, who could not get any one to engage her as governess because Mrs. Millar refused her a "character." As to Geoffrey, her head was in such a whirl she could not think distinctly about him. She had liked him as she

liked every one connected with Blanche Seymour. All that young lady's surroundings were invested with the same halo as herself. They were all perfect, though, of course, she exceeded in perfection. She should never have dreamed of looking on him as otherwise than a Seymour deity to be worshiped at a distance, and now he had told her he loved her, and asked for her love in return. How gentle and tender he was! Taking care of her as if she had been a little child, she who had always had to take care and think of others. She wondered and wondered how it all came to pass, and why.

Christmas Eve brought her a shower of congratulatory letters from home. Of course her parents consented joyfully, and would come up to town soon.

Directly after breakfast Geoffrey appeared to take her to his mother.

"See, mother dear," he said, leading her in, trembling and blushing: "I've brought you a Christmas present. Where is my father that I may show him the great gift Heaven has sent me?" and he looked at her with eager pride and affection.

The old lady kissed her lovingly, "My child, you shall be to me as my daughter."

Then the two went to Cadogan Place to take Mabel and Blanche with them to St. Hilda's, where a long day was spent, combining church decoration, prize-giving, and love-making, the latter especially, and "with Geoffrey perpetually fussing after her," as Mabel expressed it, Emily began to realize that it was not all a dream.

It was a happy, cheerful Christmas to all concerned, though Ralph pronounced Geoffrey "an unmitigated ass."

The marriage was to take place at the end of January, from Miss Peyton's house.

"Emily," said Geoffrey, a few days before, "don't you think we ought to give Archie a wedding present?"

Archie was come to London for the felicitous occasion.

"How so?" she inquired. "People who are going to be married don't usually give wedding presents, but get them."

"Yes, but as Archie is an invalid, don't you think we might make an exception in his favor? What should you say to our giving him a piano? Sending it down to Feltham, and letting him find it there when he gets back, eh?"

Her eyes sparkled with a momentary joy, but she suppressed it instantly, and

said, "It is so good of you, but it would be all your present, not mine, because I have no money."

"But you will have, my little one, when you and I are married. You know all I have will be yours then, and I thought if we looked at the piano now, you might pay for it when you keep my check-book, eh? you mean to keep my accounts, don't you?"

"I will do my best," she replied solemnly, "but I would rather not get a piano, though it is so, so good of you," and a pair of grateful eyes went up to his face.

"Well, well, we'll look at it, at any rate, so as to save trouble afterwards," and he turned into Broadwood's towards which he had been leading her, and after the wedding was over and Archie went back, cheered and better in health, he found the piano in the drawing-room and a note wishing him much enjoyment of it from his "affectionate brother and sister, Geoffrey and Emily Rivers."

A letter full of delight apprised the sister of it as she and Geoffrey were sitting together at breakfast at Hastings.

"Oh, Geoffrey!" exclaimed the bride, "how naughty of you! and you never told me!"

"What?" inquired the bridegroom; "it's rather soon to accuse me of being naughty. We have only been married a fortnight. What is it?"

"You did send the piano to Archie, though I begged you not. It is not my present at all, so he ought not to thank me for it, but you."

"It's as much yours as mine."

"No, it isn't, Geoffrey. The one who pays is the one who gives the present."

"You will, in all human probability, in a short time receive a letter directed to Mrs. Geoffrey Rivers, inclosing a bill from Messrs. Broadwood for which you will have to write a check and send at your convenience. I don't know if you call that paying for it."

"I don't, Geoffrey, but I call you the best and dearest,"—she stopped, tears in her eyes and voice, and coming behind him, threw her arms round his neck and buried her face in his black head.

A small house was taken for the pair near his parents.

"Have a house of your own from the first," had counseled his mother. "We are so near that we can see as much as we like of each other, but let the households be independent."

Advice excellent in itself, but which, unfortunately, cannot always be followed.

Helping to arrange this minute domicile in Spanish Place (the old people lived in Manchester Square), and preparing surprises for him and Emily, had afforded great delight to Mabel, Blanche, and Leila, who had come up for the wedding, and when they came home and had been feasted by every one and feasted every one in return, they settled down like a sober Darby and Joan.

Mrs. Radclyffe begged so hard that Blanche might go back to Deerscourt with Leila "just for a fortnight," that Mrs. Seymour had to consent. Horace was at Wortham, so she did not feel uneasy, and Leila gave a deplorable account of the utter stagnation she experienced in the paternal mansion. Mrs. Millar had got a governess "as Evangelical and disagreeable as herself," and she literally had not a soul to speak to.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mrs. SEYMOUR flattered herself that Horace Radclyffe was safe at Wortham in attendance on his Alice.

At Winterton Junction, the door of the carriage in which Blanche and Leila were seated, with the latter's maid to act as duenna, was opened, and Colonel Radclyffe's black visage presented itself.

"Here you are," said his soft voice, "I have been peering into every carriage, and at last spotted your scarlet feather, Blanche. How are you? I'm uncommonly glad to see you."

"Where *do* you come from?" asked Leila.

"Well, there is a court-martial I must attend next week, so as I heard you young ladies were coming to-day, I thought I would just look you up. I know Blanche is given to getting into mischief." This as he was arranging his numerous hat-boxes and gun-cases with the usual masculine fidgetiness about those cumbersome paraphernalia.

"Why, Horace, you have luggage enough for a year! You are never going back to Wortham again, are you?" exclaimed Blanche, laughing.

"I've left all my things there," he returned, clearing the place beside her, and sitting down. "I've only just brought my gun-case and a few things."

"How is Alice?"

"Better, thanks; that is, Sir Henry is better, and she always keeps pace with

him. How did your wedding go off? and how is Geoffrey now he is married."

"As happy as a king, and as proud of having a wife as if he was the only man in England who had. He is just like a boy with a new toy."

"And the young lady?"

"Very shy and very much astonished at it all still."

"Geoffrey very spoony, I suppose?"

"We'll hope so. It would be rather soon to turn crusty."

"Leila, that is what you will come to some fine day," remarked her brother.

She shook her head with a very decided negative.

"And have you been dissipated?" he went on, turning again to Blanche.

"Any balls?"

"Alas! no. I love dancing, but balls tire mamma so."

"Do you like dancing?" he inquired eagerly.

"Love it; but I think I've forgotten how to dance, it is so long since I have been to a ball."

Two or three days after as they were riding together he told her "the fellows in his regiment" were going to give a ball, which he hoped she would honor with her presence, and he engaged her for what she said was "an unconscionable number of dances."

He told her "the fellows" were giving the ball, but, in truth, he was the prime mover and promoter of it, and as it was a long time since there had been such an exciting piece of gayety at Winterton, it became the great event in the neighborhood. Mr. Radclyffe even condescended to be good-humored and good-natured about it. He himself presented Leila and Blanche with new dresses for the occasion, and proposed inviting Mrs. Seymour, Mabel, and Ralph to Deerscourt for it. They came, and it was a week of general rejoicing to all but Leila, whose dread of meeting Sir George Conway, or, in fact, any other eligible man, completely nullified any pleasure the ball might have afforded.

When Blanche went up to dress she found a number of beautiful camellias on her table, which the faithful Jane informed her the gardener had sent for her special benefit.

A happy gush overspread Blanche's face. She well knew who the gardener was.

As the young ladies were being inspected in the drawing-room previous to departure, Horace came with three magnificent

bouquets, one especially a surpassing combination of delicate reds and whites. He gave Mabel and Leila one each, and then going up to Blanche, presented her with the reserved one, whispering, as he bent admiringly over her,—“the last and best.”

He said he must be early in the ball-room, and so contrived to get his mother to come off with him and Blanche, leaving the others to follow at their leisure.

"You don't mind being a little early, Blanche, do you? you see I must be there, as I'm a sort of host."

She did not at all mind;—quite the contrary.

That moonlight drive, with Horace sitting opposite her, looking splendid in his uniform, holding her flowers as she drew on her gloves, helping her with an obstinate button, telling her of the last ball he had been to with Alice, and finally, how much he was looking forward to that first *valse* with her, was an era in her small life.

"But, Horace, I'm sure I've forgotten how to dance."

"Then we'll go wrong together. I never could do the Lancers."

The ball was all that a ball could be. The music, floor, lights, and supper, perfect. Sir George Conway was there and asked Leila to dance twice; once in the beginning of the evening and once after supper, so she had no reason to complain of his pertinacity. Blanche danced with him several times, and liked him better the more she saw him. Mabel was the admiration of the room;—so beautiful and graceful, and her dancing the perfection of motion.

"Blanche," said Horace, during the pause of a breath-exhausting *valse*, "I hear the fellows discussing which is the prettiest, you or Mabel."

"There is not much room for discussion," she answered smilingly. "Mabel is looking lovely to-night."

"Well, we all have our own opinion, you know, Blanche."

"Don't you think her beautiful?" she asked, looking disappointed.

She took any disparagement of Mabel as a personal slight.

"Very; but I think you lick her head clean off," at which elegant and pithy remark Miss Blanche Seymour laughed.

"That is very flattering, Horace; only I don't quite believe it."

"It's true, nevertheless," he said gravely. "I think you are the most beautiful girl I ever saw," and his looks confirmed his words as he bent over her.

She did look beautiful, though her features lacked the perfection of Mabel's, but her face to-night had a beauty that her sister's had not, the motive-power being, in her case, absent on this occasion—the beauty born of the consciousness, of which she was as yet all unconscious, however, of being loved by the one who, whatever she might deem, was for her the “man of men.” Her lovely complexion—the roses bathed in dew—took a softer glow as she raised her eyes to his face, those eyes that one moment sparkled and danced with fun in unison with her smiling lips, and would then soften suddenly into unutterable tenderness as if their sweet pity took in all the world.

“I suppose, Horace, you mean it as you say it,” she answered, “but I never heard I was beautiful before, except when Geoffrey used to tell me so in fun, I always thought.”

They went whirling round again, when Blanche's sandal came undone.

“Oh, Horace, I must stop. My tiresome sandal is broken. I must go to mamma and get her to take me somewhere to have it sewn on.”

“Let me take you. There's a little room at the end there where you can do it. I'll send my fellow for a needle for you.”

“I always provide myself with one. How I grieve over this *valse*!”

They went through the impromptu conservatory into a small room with a tiled floor.

“This is capital,” she said, taking a needle-case out of her pocket. “I sha'n't be two minutes.”

“I don't call it capital at all. It is very badly arranged, and enough to give you your death of cold,” and before she knew what he meant he had taken off his coat and thrown it on the floor.

“Stand on that, Blanche; the cold stones will chill you in your thin shoes after dancing.”

“Oh, no, Horace,” she exclaimed, looking and feeling quite overwhelmed. “I wouldn't do that for the world. Put on your coat; you will catch cold yourself. I shall not be a second doing it.”

“Now, Blanche, don't be obstinate. You know I could lift you up and put you standing on it, and hold you there with the greatest ease imaginable; so come,” and he drew her on to the improvised carpet.

“Don't boast of your strength in that way, Horace; I'm quite aware of it, and after all, it's no merit—you share it with

bulls and lions, and other savage beasts. But you're very kind, and I feel quite ashamed at turning your poor coat into a carpet. You are a second Raleigh.”

He was blissfully ignorant of Raleigh and his contemporaries, but that did not much disturb his peace of mind. “They ought to have laid down some matting here,” he went on; “it is very unsafe for a lady to stand on the stones after dancing.”

“I think, Horace, you are the most thoughtful man I ever met.”

He smiled.

“What a little shoe, Blanche! I can't think how you get it on.”

“It fits very well,” and she gave the elastic a tug to see if it was firm; then resting one hand on his arm for support she put it on.

“Now, I suppose, I may stand off your coat?”

“Yes, but go into the other room where there is some matting.”

When he followed her—

“Horace, I can't thank you enough! Isn't your coat all dirty and crumpled?”

“What? from your feet? My coat has been highly honored.”

“Your flower is crushed out of all knowledge at such treatment.”

“Well, give me one of those, and I'll wear it instead, as your gift.”

She broke off a piece of some lovely exotic near, and presented it smiling.

“What lovely flowers! Where did you get them?”

“From London.”

“What? for this ball?”

“Yes.”

“How extravagant you are! By the by, Horace, Sir George tells me *you* got this ball up yourself. I thought you told me it was the officers.”

“Well; don't you call me an officer?”

“I mean you did not tell me you were the chief promoter.”

“Didn't I?”

“No. What put it into your head, as Alice could not come?”

“Some one said she loved dancing, and had not been to a ball for such ages, she had forgotten how to dance,” he answered smiling, and looking down at her.

“Oh, Horace! then did you do it for me? that was good of you!”

“Very; I feel it; and you are going to reward me with another *valse* to make up for the one we missed.”

“Horace, did you send me those camellias?”

"I ordered some to be sent in."

"You see I have got two in my hair. You sent so many, I gave some to Mabel."

"Of course. They were for you to do as you pleased with. We may as well sit here till this quadrille is over, and then we can have our turn again."

"I think, Horace, at least I know I'm engaged for the next *valse*."

"Oh, never mind. I lost my last dance with you, so I really have a right to this."

"Perhaps the man would not mind," she said doubtfully.

"Who is he?"

"I could not catch his name, but I should know him. He's a tall, dark man, not good-looking, with a square sort of moustache."

"A square moustache! what's that like?"

"Well, not a sweeping one like yours. There he comes, Horace, to claim my promise," and she looked up pleadingly to be let go.

"Not a bit of it, Blanche, I'm not going to lose two dances with you," and putting his arm suddenly round her, he whirled her away.

The disappointed claimant stood with folded arms leaning against the door-post, watching every turn she and her partner took, not angrily, but as if it were the most natural thing in the world that she should have thrown him over.

"Their brain capacity is not enough to enable them to understand that a promise made ought to be kept," he said, half aloud.

When Blanche returned to her mother he went up to her. "Did you know you had promised me that dance?" he asked in a deep voice.

She looked up frankly. "I'm very sorry; indeed I don't know how to apologize enough. I was engaged to my cousin for the *valse* before, but my sandal broke and we lost it, so he insisted on having the next. I know it looked very rude, but it was a mistake, and I hope you will forgive me."

"You are the first young lady I ever asked to dance of my own accord, and you disappointed me."

"I have done my best to explain why," she answered, coloring, as if to express—"I have apologized, which ought to satisfy you."

"Are you engaged for the next round dance?" he asked, looked at her as he might look at a specimen of some unknown animal.

"Yes, to my brother, but I will ask him to let me off, if you wish."

"You don't mind throwing him over then?"

"It's not throwing him over, if I ask him and he consents. At least, I'm sure, he will not consider it so."

"I should like to dance with you," he said slowly, still looking at her, though not staringly.

"I shall be most happy to do so, but I must just explain to my brother how it is."

At that moment Horace came up.

"Horace, find Ralph for me. I want him to let me off the next dance."

The stranger withdrew to his old post by the door, and she added in a low voice, "Do find out who that extraordinary creature is! He is the greatest curiosity I ever met."

"That big fellow? Is he savage? I've just got Ralph to take some young ladies down to supper, and I've begged that dance of him for myself. He told me he was engaged to you, but I said it was sheer waste, and I couldn't allow it, so he very properly gave you up."

"Yes; but I really must dance with that gentleman this time. I promised."

"Hang him, Blanche! You know nothing of him. He'll think I'm your brother and won't let you off."

"No; I told him you were my cousin."

"The deuce you did! you are very intimate already."

"I had to apologize and explain how it was."

"Well, never mind him. I sha'n't let you off. I begged this dance of Ralph for myself."

"Horace, I can't," she said firmly. "I could not do such a thing twice."

His face darkened so that she started, and his blue eyes, which were before smiling, became as cold and hard as steel.

"Oh, Horace, you are not going to be angry with me?" she exclaimed, with a sudden gasp of pain in her throat.

A fierce, muttered imprecation was his answer, as he turned away. She did not quite catch it, but his look destroyed the brightness of the scene for her. The stranger watched them from his station by the door, and when Horace was gone came up, inquiring if she were free.

"Yes; I shall be happy to dance with you," she answered, recovering herself with difficulty.

"Apparently your brother does not approve?" he remarked inquiringly.

She turned away with a proud gesture,

and saw Horace scowling at her from the other side of the room. Her partner for the next quadrille came up, and she went off talking and laughing, determined not to let him see how his wrath affected her.

"How can he be so unreasonably angry? it is not my fault. Still I do wish I had not had to vex him—he is so kind!" Such was the tenor of her reflections, as she responded to her interlocutor's inanities.

"The ball is a great success, is it not?"

She coincided, though at that moment she felt that it was a gigantic failure.

"It is all Radclyffe's doing, you know."

Yes, she knew it too well, and wished the knowledge did not make her feel so miserable.

"I think he must be going to stand for the county on the newest Liberal principles that he should give himself so much trouble. Look at him flirting away with old Foster's daughter."

At last it was over, and she could sit down, but the obnoxious unknown was instantly beside her, and she had to get through that *valse* with him. He danced execrably, and rubbed her the wrong way every time he opened his lips. He talked condescendingly, trying to bring his remarks down to a level with her capacity: his very look and air aggravated her inexpressibly, all her senses being on the stretch to see Horace or catch the sound of his voice.

He was dancing lugubriously with some unfortunate girl who much marvelled that a man who danced as if he could not help it, and was such a thorough wet blanket, should trouble himself to come to a ball, much less give one, as gossip said he did. He would not vouchsafe Blanche a look as they passed each other.

He had given her playful but strict injunctions not to go down to supper with any one but himself. She counted on his coming, and would then endeavor to mollify him. Very late, and when she had declined many offers of escort from various gorgeously-appareled warriors, her late partner among others, though he was not in uniform, Horace came slowly up to her, looking very black.

"Have you had any supper?"

"No; I waited for you, as you told me," and she looked reproach at him. "Horace, why are you angry with me? indeed, I could not have done otherwise, and you *know* I would rather have danced with you."

His face softened. "Would you, really? I confess I was very savage and bitterly disappointed, but never mind now. Come down-stairs. I have found out who your man is."

"I don't care who he is; he is very disagreeable and a bore," she said, breathing freely, intense relief in her face. "Have you forgiven me, Horace?" for he still looked cloudy.

He smiled, laying his hand on the small one resting on his arm.

"All right, Blanche. I was only rabid for the time, when I saw that fellow carry you off; but I won't be any more, and I'll even give you leave to dance with him again if you like. He is a literary lion, and has traveled or done something, and is a friend of Conway's."

"What is his name?"

"Vivian, a brother of Lord Glennorth. He's a rum 'un, they tell me, but rich, so he is worth following up, and I withdraw in his favor, as you seem to have made a conquest."

The words reached her ears, but their true significance did not penetrate to her mind. She only felt that he was no longer angry, and troubled her head no further. But he had a very definite meaning in what he said. His brother officers and friends had long since become aware of his devotion to his beautiful cousin, but this night it was so apparent that they did not hesitate to open their minds to him on the subject with that charming frankness which it is the especial privilege of such persons to assume. He was asked in every variety of tone—if he had introduced her to Miss Wentworth? if the other match was off? if he meant to betake himself to Salt Lake City? and many similar questions, which, though he answered jestingly, considerably disturbed his peace of mind. The marriage with Alice was essential to his prospects, and she would resent deeply any flirtation or trifling with another girl's affections, should the report reach her.

His scowling looks when Mr. Vivian was dancing with her had promptly been made a matter of chaff, therefore he smothered his fierce anger and resolved to be careful what he did in public. He told Blanche he would withdraw his claims in Mr. Vivian's favor partly to satisfy his own conscience (he persuaded himself he did not wish to stand in her light), and partly to give the lie to any rumors that might be set afloat. It was a nuisance that people would talk, for, of course, there could be no harm in his liking Blanche

just as a charming companion, and the best and jolliest girl he had ever met,—except Alice, naturally. She knew he was engaged to be married, so there could be no mistake. Of *her* feelings he took, as yet, no account,—never thought of them, in fact. No doubt they were as admirably regulated as his own. His heart would never interfere with the plans his head devised, and he judged her to be equally “sensible.” He would be more careful in public, but this resolve did not forbid his driving home with her and discussing with her every event of the night, though it made his teasing about the conquest he persisted in saying she had achieved more pointed than it would otherwise have been.

With the exception of that passing cloud it had been a time of intense happiness and enjoyment to her, and she told him so. He took her hand.

“I was very ferocious, Blanche, I confess,” he said smiling, “till I found out who he was; but when I heard that Glen-north has no children nor is likely to have, and that this fellow will be a peer one day, I reflected on the error of my ways and subsided.”

“He may be what he pleases for me. I never want to see him again.”

She was too full of excitement to sleep, and she and Mabel sat by the fire till the “envious day” of a cold, raw February morning “peeped in.”

“Did you ever, Mabel, know any one so kind and thoughtful as Horace? was it not good of him to think of this ball? hasn’t it been delightful? and, Mabel, don’t you consider that it was very touching of him to take off his coat for me to stand on?”

Mabel agreed with her that it certainly was “very touching;” she also in her secret heart thought Horace the most enchanting of human beings, but she devoutly wished Blanche at home, and said as much to Ralph the next day.

“You see, Ralph, Blanche is just the sort of girl to break her heart for a man she likes, and she is exalting Horace on a pedestal much higher than he deserves, for he ought not, in my humble opinion, to go on as he does with her, being engaged to another girl.”

All this Ralph repeated to his mother, as the result of his own observation, strongly advising that all future visits of Blanche to Deerscourt should be stopped.

His mother entirely agreed with him, congratulating herself that her daughter had such a tender and affectionate brother.

In spite of Mr. and Mrs. Radclyffe’s entreaties, she insisted on taking Blanche with her when she returned to town a few days after the ball.

Sir George Conway thus wrote of the Winterton festivities to his sister:—

“I danced only twice with Leila, for she looked so miserable all the time that I was afraid to venture again. She was as pretty and graceful as usual, but I made no way with her. The Seymour girls were there, looking lovely; Horace Radclyffe was devoted in his attentions to Blanche. Were I her mother I should fear for her peace of mind, he being engaged. I hear he got the ball up entirely for her. I danced with her several times. She is charming; so, in fact, are both sisters. The brother was there, too. Leila danced very often with him. He is a man I don’t much fancy. Percy Vivian is here still. He honored the ball with his presence, and evidently spent the time trying to solve the problem why so many useless young ladies are sent into the world. He danced with Blanche Seymour, but I doubt if she appreciated the favor, and I rather suspect she gave him a one-er from something he let drop.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LEILA excepted, the whole Radclyffe family resented highly Mrs. Seymour’s having taken Blanche away.

“Why couldn’t she have let her stay? she can do no good in London.”

Before her father Leila said nothing, but alone with her mother and brother she plainly gave it as her opinion that Blanche was much better away, and ought not to come to Deerscourt again. “Much as I like her I cannot but say so; I think, Horace, you are not acting fairly to either her or Alice.”

“What the —— do you mean?” he demanded, his face darkening. “Surely a man may speak to a girl without its being necessary for him to marry her. She knows I’m engaged, and Alice is not such a fool as to think I am never to open my lips to any one but herself.”

“I must say, Leila,” said her mother warmly, “that I don’t see what you mean. I wouldn’t do anything to vex dear Alice for the world, with her father ill and all, but I can’t understand your saying Horace is acting unfairly. Alice can’t know what goes on here.”

"That does not alter the matter at all," said Leila coldly.

"There now, Leila, you speak in that cold way as if I had committed a crime," whined Mrs. Radclyffe. "I'm sure I did no harm by asking Blanche here."

Leila knew how useless it was to argue with her mother.

"I know, mamma; only, as you say you asked her on my account, please don't any more."

"I don't ask her on your account only," said Mrs. Radclyffe warmly, much fearing that if her daughter discovered her tactics they would be all thrown away. "I asked her because your father likes her, and I like her, and we all do, and I thought when they were poor it was a real kindness."

Leila was perfectly aware of her mother's motive, but forbore to answer.

Horace was walking up and down the room excitedly.

"It's a case of 'save me from my friends' with you, Leila," he went on; "Blanche is the nicest and most sensible girl in the world, and would be the last to want all this — fuss made about her. Because you never will speak to a man yourself you don't want any one else to do so," and he left the room in deep anger.

It may be observed, *en passant*, that men invariably call women sensible when they agree with their *dicta* or opinion, otherwise they are fools, wild, and not worth attending to. This is a convenient and pleasing method of avoiding disagreeable discussions.

Leila was very much afraid of Horace, though she tried to persuade herself she was not, and it had been a great effort to her to say a word to him on such a subject, but a generous impulse, combined with the fears she was quick enough to see that Mrs. Seymour and Mabel entertained, overcame her hesitation.

"There now, Leila," said Mrs. Radclyffe, in great distress, "you have made dear Horace angry. What shall I do between you all?"

"I can't help Horace being angry, mamma," returned Leila boldly, though really she felt in a horrible fright; "I think it is not fair having Blanche here, and I say so."

"But would you tell me why?"

"Because I think she is getting to like Horace too much; and as he can't marry her, it is not right."

"Of course he can't marry her." The very mention of such a catastrophe al-

most sent Mrs. Radclyffe into hysterics of fright; "she has not a farthing; and as to her liking Horace, I think you are quite wrong. Now, if I was asked, I should say she rather disliked him than otherwise. Why, she is always quarrelling with him, and contradicting him, and laughing at him. That's not my idea of liking a person; and she knows he's engaged. He could not marry her if he wished it ever so much. He never would be so wicked as to throw dear Alice over."

Leila made no reply, and after a pause, during which Mrs. Radclyffe was tortured for a moment with a doubt as to whether her son could really be guilty of the enormity of "behaving badly" to eight thousand pounds a year, she resumed, "Did Blanche tell you she liked Horace?"

"Mamma! How can you ask such a question? It is too bad! Is it likely any girl would tell one such a thing? do you suppose I have no eyes?" and much doubting whether she had done any good by speaking at all, she left the room.

Mrs. Radclyffe felt deeply aggrieved. She could not understand Leila's conduct. She had no intention whatever of giving up her plan of acting on her through Blanche. It had hitherto succeeded, for though she was not yet Lady Conway or Lady Anybody, still she was brighter and less self-contained,—even her father and brother had noticed that; but, in order to carry out her plan, and to obtain the personal relief Blanche's visits always procured her by soothing her husband's temper, it was necessary to persuade not only Leila, but herself, also, that she was not acting unfairly towards her, and how could she do this better than by insisting on the purity of her own motives, and the bad return she met from her daughter, "who always was so inexplicable and so unkind to her"?

While this controversy raged at Deerscourt, Blanche went back to London feeling very much unsettled and out of spirits. She could not interest herself in any of her old pursuits. Even music became painful to her. Every song she sang recalled some look or word of Horace, and when she could no longer deny to herself how much she missed him, and at the same time knew she ought not to think about him, she put the music aside, resolved to conquer her folly. But it was not so easy to do this, for he wrote constantly, and strive as she would, could not but look forward to the days which his letters regularly came.

These epistles were certainly not brilliant compositions; the writing was abominable, and the spelling often unique, but their arrival made a *fête* of her day. She did not always answer them: he wrote two, sometimes three, for her one, but she kept them all, with sundry useless, dried-up flowers, carefully treasured in her desk.

She endeavored not to find life dull, not to feel irritable and *désœuvrée*; and as she had a courageous soul in her slight body, she succeeded to some extent, though she often secretly sympathized with that sagacious reptile who

“discovered that life was a load,
And began to be weary of being a toad.”

Cadogan Place missed Geoffrey, too. It is true they saw a great deal of him and Emily, but it was in a different way; and Blanche missed the old confidence, and the cheerful, joyous intercourse of former days. Money anxieties increased also. Even Mrs. Seymour and Mabel could no longer deny that Ralph grew more and more lax in his attention to business. He went daily less to the works, saying he had a manager on whom he could thoroughly depend.

His translation of Horace having failed completely, he was now bent on tempting fortune with one of Martial. He had also started a weekly Journal of Chemistry, from which he augured great things. He was very little at home, and his mother knew absolutely nothing of their pecuniary affairs. He had ceased to speak of refunding Mabel's money, though he supplied the wherewithal for their personal wants; but Blanche felt certain that large bills were owing for household and other expenses. A general sense of uneasiness pervaded their minds, which even Mrs. Seymour's and Mabel's blind affection could not dissipate.

About a month after they had left Deerscourt, Horace, who was kept there by his regimental duties, received a telegram summoning him at once to Wortham. Sir Henry Wentworth was very ill. He was with Alice as quickly as the train could take him.

Sir Henry was alive, and after a period of intense suffering, rallied, contrary to all medical predictions; but the anxiety, constant watching, and sitting up at night had been too much for Alice, and she caught a violent cold, which she neglected, having no time to think of herself. Acute inflammation of the lungs ensued, and she died after a few days' illness, Horace

holding her hand, and promising faithfully to be a son to her father.

His patience was not taxed long. The spark of life in the old man's frame was so feeble that it could not long survive such a sudden blast of misfortune. When he heard that his child was dead, his tender nurse, his untiring companion, whom irritability never soured nor dullness wearied, he bent his head in silence for some time, and then said, “Horace, take me to her room,” and there he sat beside the bed, and gazed long and earnestly at the marble face.

“I shall go to her,” he said slowly; “she cannot return to me.” That lament of the Israelitish king has comforted many a stricken heart since it was uttered on that dismal morning by the dead baby's bed.

Sir Henry lingered a week or two, tenderly watched over by Horace, and then was placed beside his daughter in the Wentworth vault. Even death could not long separate the two who had loved each other so devotedly.

The blow to Horace was overwhelming. He was to a certain extent affectionate, though not very warm-hearted. Alice's refusal to marry him at once had, it is true, produced a little estrangement on his part, but he was really fond of her, and when she was thus suddenly snatched from him it brought back all the tender feelings of their early intercourse.

Then death, encountered in this private way, was to him very appalling. He had faced it in a hundred shapes by land and sea himself, and had seen others do so, without shrinking, but he had never felt its sting till he saw this fair girl ruthlessly torn from his arms. With all this there mingled the sentiment, growing daily stronger as the first grief wore off, of the injury to his worldly prospects. He would see the heir-at-law take possession of the place he had looked forward to as his own.

After his daughter's death and when his mind was collected enough to attend to business, Sir Henry sent for his lawyer and left Horace a legacy of several thousand pounds. It is perhaps not much to say that Horace was no worse than other people if a feeling of bitterness, which, to do him justice, he tried to stifle, arose in his mind as he reflected how different his position would have been had Alice consented to be his wife two or three years before.

He went up to London and arrived at the Seymours' house looking so miserably ill, so unlike himself, that they were all

shocked. He had a frightful cold and cough, and after the first greetings were all over and he had given some particulars of the event, he threw himself on the sofa thoroughly exhausted.

Mrs. Seymour persuaded him to let her send for his servant and his things, and to take up his quarters at her house for that night at least. He looked so ill that she had not the heart to let him go, and her fears for her child were forgotten in the great misfortune which had befallen him. Even Ralph made no objection to the arrangement, and acknowledged that he bore the appearance of "having had a facer."

And now all the tenderness of Blanche's nature came out. She sympathized with him, and waited on him, watching and anticipating every want, sang to him, wrote his letters, and in fact, as her brother observed, "did the ministering angel to perfection." His cold was very bad for some days, and though he at first protested feebly when she and Mabel, reversing the natural order, attended on him, he very soon submitted with a marvelously good grace; and if he was spoiled at home, he certainly ran as great a chance of being utterly ruined now as any man in England.

When his cold was better he walked out every day with the two girls in the Park, and sometimes he would ask leave to take Blanche alone of an afternoon, when Mabel went out driving with her mother. He gradually recovered his spirits a little, but showed no disposition to return to Deerscourt, though he would occasionally say he was sure he gave an awful lot of trouble; they must wish him at Hong Kong or elsewhere; which remarks, when made to Blanche, were intended as a "draw" to a pair of lovely eyes glancing reproachfully at him, and, "Horace, how can you be so absurd?" or, "Yes, we are longing for you to go," a laughing misstatement which Miss Blanche Seymour considered it no sin to make, on account of its utter improbability.

"What sort of a man is that servant of yours?" she asked him one day, as he lay on the sofa, and she sat in the window drawing.

"How do you mean? He does all I want for me. Has he been giving any trouble here?"

"Not at all; only my attendant, Miss Jane Hedges, entertains me with marvelous accounts of his sayings and doings, and I want to know what he is like."

"I know no harm of him. He has

been with me some time. Is Miss Hedges that young woman who comes in to Mabel to have her work put right?"

"Yes; Mabel is determined she shall learn to work; but she mars more than she makes, and is perpetually at a standstill, till Mabel can undo what she has done wrong."

"And is she carrying on with Davis?"

"I wouldn't say she does not think him a very fine fellow. She asked me to-day if I was not of opinion that he was something, just a little, like you."

"Like me? Why, he's a good four inches shorter."

Was there ever a tall man who did not resent having a shorter one compared with him?

"Oh, she didn't enter into particulars. I dare say she meant in a general way. But, Horace, is he steady, and sober, and all that? because I have a weakness for my maid, and should not like her to fall into bad hands."

"I tell you, Blanche, I know no harm of him. Of course I never interfere with his private affairs; so long as he does what I tell him, that is all I look to."

"I think he has sung away Jane's heart. She says he sings 'just beautiful.'"

"I never knew he could sing. Isn't that the girl whose cap used to tumble off?"

"Yes."

"She is an uncommonly good-looking young woman. I commend Mr. Davis's taste."

"Horace," said Mabel, coming in laughing at this precise moment, "I think your man has bewitched Jane. I had some hopes of her before he came;—her fingers were always all thumbs, but now they are absolutely—well, I suppose I must call them toes. She can't even thread a needle, and while I was carefully explaining to her the construction of my new dress, she interrupted me to inform me that Mr. Davis admired blue on a lady more than any other color."

"Then that accounts for the profusion of Jane's blue ribbons lately. She must expend her little all on the purchase of them," said Blanche.

"I'm afraid Davis is a gay deceiver," said Horace. "I always thought he had a young lady at Winterton."

After Easter Leila came up to stay in Cadogan Place, and Horace, much to his regret, had to return to his regimental duties, finding it quite impossible to get any more leave.

And again Blanche felt intense sympathy with that toad mentioned above.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GEOFFREY and Emily had settled down as a sober Darby and Joan. Emily was an excellent little housekeeper, and took her share of the district work, entering warmly into all Geoffrey's plans, and sympathizing with his failures. But there was not much housekeeping to do for their small *ménage*, and his mother had warned him so much against the dangers of over-fatigue and infection, that he felt fears for his wife he never entertained for the young ladies who ministered in his district, and would not let her go as often, or do as much, as she wished.

As he was necessarily out a great deal, the spare time began to hang heavily on her hands. She had her books still and her music, and Mrs. Rivers took her out driving almost every day. She saw the Seymours, Blanche especially, constantly; still there was a blank, never felt when Geoffrey was with her, certainly, but making itself more apparent day by day during his absence.

Since the primeval marriage it has been natural that a man should "leave his father and mother and should cleave unto his wife." As a rule they do so, and are the better and happier for it. The generality of men settle down comfortably with the young wife who receives their confidences and thinks all they do perfect. There are exceptions, of course. The man who has been used to the friendship of clever and cultivated women, and who marries, as such a man usually does, one whose good looks exceed her intellectual powers, though she may be practically clever enough, sometimes, perhaps often, sighs for the freedom he has lost, and finds the yoke gall; but if he is wise and worth anything, he submits to be moulded by the sharer of his destiny, and does not exhibit his "heart on his sleeve" for the daws of an appreciative public to peck at. But this is the exception: the husband ordinarily finds in his wife all the companionship he needs or desires. Then he still lives among his own people, and all old ties and associations are not broken up as in the case of the wife.

She leaves the home of her youth, her brothers and sisters, all that has hitherto constituted her world, to cast in her lot

with one of whom, perhaps, comparatively, she knows little; and if she is young the affection is probably stronger on his side than hers. She must be superhumanly strong or superhumanly indifferent if she does not, after the first excitement has worn off, pine for the cheerful circle she has left. She becomes alive to the fact that she can never be "one of them" again; that she is henceforth an outsider, and her heart goes back with an intenser longing and yearning for "all of them at home."

It is at this most trying time of a wife's life that a man shows of what stuff he is made. If he is forbearing and patient—if he is large-hearted enough not to feel, or show that he feels, jealousy or bitterness, he has established a claim on the tenderness and gratitude of the young creature who has given up all for him which no after-unkindness ever really cancels. The sad thing is how few men can go through the ordeal. They are grievously hurt at the discovery that they are not all-sufficing, and this soreness of feeling has shipwrecked many a married life that began smoothly enough.

It may well be thought that Emily Rivers, having come out of such troubled waters into smooth sailing, with Geoffrey for her pilot, ought to have known no regrets; but the man who remarked that "human nature was a rum 'un" pronounced a truth which every individual's own experience confirms.

She certainly knew no regrets as far as her marriage was concerned. Geoffrey was all that a husband could be, and she had everything that love and affection could supply, but the home-sickness which had been one of the miseries of her life while at Deerscourt Rectory seized on her now with redoubled force; and though she tried manfully—or better still, womanfully—to hide all traces of it from Geoffrey, he saw plainly enough that she drooped and pined daily more and more. The sad look which it had been his pride to have banished from the sweet young face came back, though it would partially disappear in his presence. He attributed it at first to over-fatigue, and, mindful of his mother's precepts, would not take her out so much with him.

The hot weather brought increased sickness into the poor neighborhood of his church, and he was so nervous for her that he would hardly allow her to go there at all. Thus she was left frequently alone for long weary hours.

He never absolutely told her not to go

out alone, but she soon discovered that he disliked her doing so, and gave it up. When she proposed shopping, or visiting Blanche, he would suggest a cab and a maid.

Now, this constant use of cabs was something so new to her that she could not accustom herself to it. Money had been such a scarce commodity to her all her life that she with difficulty brought herself to waste it, as she considered, on cabs, and when, out of deference to his wishes, she had to go in one of those vehicles, she could not divest herself of the feeling that she was needlessly extravagant. Besides, it was a *gêne*. Could she have walked to Cadogan Place independently and come back so, she would have enjoyed it, but a cab and a maid were too ceremonious.

Her sister had spent a fortnight with her in the spring, and Geoffrey was pressing that she should remain longer, but Mrs. Peyton would not consent. Her poverty made her p ou tenacious. "Neither Geoffrey's friendlynor he himself," she said, "must think that he will have all Emily's family thrust on him."

Geoffrey was sorely puzzled how to account for his little bride's increasing depression and delicate looks. She said she was well and perfectly happy. He longed to consult some one, but feared to say a word to his mother, as he had always heard there was nothing a young wife so resented as a mother-in-law's interference, and in his simple-hearted loyalty he considered that it would be treason to his wife to take counsel with Blanche, as he would formerly have done.

The quick eyes in Cadogan Place had noticed her paleness and low spirits, and Leila had not failed to deduce from them a confirmation of her theory that every marriage was unhappy; but as Emily never said a word that could afford an opening, it was impossible to offer sympathy.

Seeing her, as he thought, unhappy, Geoffrey became so too, thinking she did not care for him, and regretted the step she had taken. His old buoyant spirits forsook him, and he was pronounced by every one to be "only the ghost of his former self." Things went on in this way for some time.

One very wet morning, as the pair sat at breakfast, Emily, dreading the long day alone, said, "Geoffrey, let me go with you to-day to St. Hilda's. I'm not a bit tired."

"My little one, it is such a wet day, and

I have so much to do, I shall have to be away all day. It would be too much for you."

She never asked a second time if he objected once.

"Very well, Geoffrey; it doesn't signify."

Geoffrey thought sadly—"No; it does not signify; she doesn't care to be with me," which was unreasonable, as he had just refused to let her come, but when was Love ever reasonable?

They finished breakfast in silence, Emily hardly eating anything: and then, when he had ascertained that she had books to amuse her, he kissed her and left her.

He never failed to visit his father and mother every morning on his way to his work, and to-day he was so depressed that the latter saw something was wrong. She questioned him, and he confessed to being uneasy about his wife: she was low and out of spirits, and he could not tell why. Mrs. Rivers suggested that perhaps she was a little home-sick. The idea was a new one to him—and painful, too—for he immediately concluded she could not care for him or she would not feel so. He had never heard of married people being home-sick.

Having forgotten something at his own house, he went back for it on quitting his mother. Emily had ordered the dinner, and gone up to the drawing-room to get through the time till luncheon as well as she could. It was raining heavily,—one of those days which made the Frenchman wonder the English nation did not commit suicide in a body.

The day, the sense of loneliness, and a feeling which had taken hold of her since Geoffrey had not allowed her to go so much to St. Hilda's, that he thought her useless and unfit to be his helpmate, combined to make her utterly wretched. She stood at the window looking at the heavy, dirty, London rain, and large tears, which she could not restrain, rolled down her face. Suddenly she heard Geoffrey's step on the stairs, and, drying them hastily, turned to meet him.

"Geoffrey! I thought you were gone long ago."

"So I was, but I forgot the books and came back for them." He put his arm round her, looking at her wistfully. "Emily, you have been crying. What is it, dear? has anything happened?"

"Nothing at all," she answered, trying to smile cheerfully.

"But you've been crying."

"Nonsense, Geoffrey; I haven't."

"Emily, you naughty child, don't you know you ought not to tell your husband even a very white fib?" He raised her face and kissed it.

"There are many things I don't know," he modestly confessed, "but I do know if my little bride is unhappy and has been crying. What is it, Emily? tell me, dear."

"Nothing, indeed, Geoffrey."

"If you won't tell me, I must guess."

"You can't," she said, looking up at him with some curiosity.

"Will you tell me if I guess right?"

"Yes: but you can't, for it is nothing."

"Suppose I were to say it is very dull here, a wet day, and so on, and that my poor little one feels rather home-sick, eh?"

The intelligence that gleamed in her eyes was answer enough, but though they said as plainly as eyes could, "How did you know?" she was so overwhelmed by the fear of his being pained that she could not utter a word.

"I see I have guessed right," he went on, trying to suppress the pang the knowledge gave him. "Now what do you say to our putting ourselves in the train to-morrow and going down to Feltham to surprise your mother by a visit?"

"Oh, Geoffrey!" and her face became radiant.

"And then you could stay with her for a little while if you liked, eh?"

"But you would stay too, Geoffrey?"

"I should take you to Feltham, Emmy, and leave y u there; I could not stay away long from my work, you know."

"But, Geoffrey," she said rather timidly, "I should not like to stay without you." She was still very shy and diffident, and by no means brave in asserting her position as a wife. "Should you stay here alone?" and she looked uneasily at him.

"Yes, dear; where else should I stay?"

There was a pause, during which she played nervously with his chain as she leaned against him.

"But, Geoffrey, shouldn't you feel—rather lonely?"

"Yes, dear, I shall, but I sha'n't mind for a little while"—he stroked her hair—

"I think you want change; *it is* dull here when I'm out so much."

"Oh, Geoffrey! I don't want change," she cried, looking up, her eyes full of tears: "but I do badly want to see mamma, and Mary, and Archie, just for a little. I know it sounds ungrateful to

you and your mother when you are so kind to me."

"I don't want gratitude," he said sadly.

"No; but it is ungrateful, though it isn't, either, only I don't know how to tell you. And how did you know, Geoffrey? I did try not to let you see."

"I wish you had let me see, Emily. I would rather have known why you were so unhappy."

She seized his hand. "Oh, Geoffrey, I wasn't unhappy; and don't think me a horrid little ungrateful thing! I do like you so much, Geoffrey," she went on nervously, seeing his kindly face contract with pain, "and I can't tell why I want to see mamma. I saw her not so long ago."

"Because, my child, I suppose you are lonely."

"I'm not when you are with me," she said eagerly. "Geoffrey, if I could be of any use to y u and could go with you! I'm so sorry I am no help to you."

"My dear little one, you are of the greatest use to me! you are my wife, are you not? and my dearest little friend and companion? I only objected to your coming so much to St. Hilda's for fear of tiring you."

"But it does not tire me, indeed. If I had gone on being some one's governess I should often have been far more tired. When I was with Mrs. Millar I used often to be so tired I didn't know what to do. If I thought I could be of use to you, Geoffrey, and you liked to have me, I should be——" happier, she was going to say, but stopped, fearing to wound him.

He supplied the word, smiling a wistful, sad smile.

She colored deeply.

"I hoped I should have made you very happy, Emily," he said regretfully. "I was so happy myself, I thought you were too, till I saw you drooping more and more every day."

"Oh, Geoffrey, don't, please," she said in a voice of agony. "I have been very happy, and you are so kind to me: only, I don't know why, I wanted so badly to see mamma; and then I am so useless to you, and I thought you might be sorry you had married me, perhaps; I can't fancy I'm any comfort to you."

His answer no doubt consoled her, for she dried her eyes, and after a time he said, "Now, Emily, as I suppose you won't be all day packing, I'll take you to see Blanche this morning, and you can come home in time to make your

preparations and write to your mother, and we'll be off to-morrow morning."

They started for Cadogan Place, feeling happier than they had been for some time. On their way they called on Mrs. Rivers. The suddenness of her son's movements always amused her, but she did not hint to Emily that he had spoken about her. She told her the change would do her good, and advised her to bring back a brother or sister with her.

"Isn't it good of him?" said Emily rather shyly, glancing at her lord and master. His mother's smile acknowledged as much.

"Here, Blanche," he exclaimed in something of his old cheery voice when they went into the drawing-room in Cadogan Place, "I've brought you Emily to take care of. She is dreadfully moped, poor little mortal! Will you go back home with her and help her to pack, and dine with us? and I'll bring you safe home to-night, unless you like to sleep at our house."

When left alone Mrs. Geoffrey Rivers burst forth into a warm panegyric on her husband.

"Just think, Blanche! he came in and saw I had been crying and guessed the reason, and instead of being disgusted and thinking me silly and horrid, he proposed this delightful plan of our going to Feltham to-morrow."

Gradually Blanche drew all her troubles from her, but new ones sprang up as the old ones disappeared. She was now full of fear for Geoffrey's comfort at her home.

"You know, Blanche, it isn't all comfortable, and we haven't a lot of servants and all that," and she colored painfully.

"Never mind, dear; Geoffrey will understand."

"You must tell Leila it is not so dreadful to be Geoffrey's wife," said Blanche laughing when they went downstairs again. "Here has she been maintaining that he is a tyrant and a brute."

"Why?" asked Emily, coloring in indignant astonishment.

"I didn't say so of him in particular," said Leila rather in confusion.

"I think if you knew him you would not say so," remarked Emily with great dignity, and bridling up in his defense like a small Amazon.

"It is only fair to add that she says so of all men," observed Mabel.

"You can have no reason to say so of Geoffrey," exclaimed Geoffrey's wife warmly. "It would be a downright

shame of any one to say a word against him. He is the best and kindest——" She came to a full stop, quite overcome with the remembrance of his forbearance. "It is I who have been so horrid, wanting to see mamma when he did everything he could for me."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Seymour, "don't distress yourself. Leila says a great deal I'm sure she does not mean."

Leila secretly assured herself she did mean it, but being in a minority, prudently abstained from speech.

Geoffrey took Emily to Feltham, stayed with her a couple of days, and constituted himself the divinity of the Peyton family. He laughed at his wife's fears for his comfort, made the best of everything in a way that only a man very much in love indeed could have done, and Mrs. Peyton hoped that he would succeed in persuading her husband not to abandon farming and migrate *en famille* to London to emulate Whittington, which was his last craze.

Geoffrey left Emily behind for a longer visit, assuring her with many caresses and protestations that though he should be dull without her, still he would be happier at her remaining in the country for a fortnight or so "to get back her roses."

The letters they wrote to each other during this brief separation did more, probably, to make them know each other than any personal intercourse could have done, and when, at the end of three weeks, he came down to take her and Archie up to town, and she sprang to meet him, exclaiming, "Oh, Geoffrey, I thought you never were coming!" her home-sickness had passed away.

"And o'er the hills, and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day,
Through all the world she followed him."

CHAPTER XXX.

THIS little episode in the lives of Geoffrey and Emily was a theme of lively interest in Cadogan Place, especially to Leila Radclyffe, who showed an intense, almost morbid curiosity regarding all that concerned Emily. She was not a girl who made friends among those of her own age—Blanche Seymour was her only *confidante*—so had had no opportunity of learn-

ing from those of her own standing whether they were happier married or single. She had her own ideas, and was always eager to seek confirmation of them; mingled in this one instance with a nervous hope that she might be mistaken, for, in the bottom of her heart, she had a lurking liking for Geoffrey, and would have been glad to except him from her doleful category.

She pronounced decisively that Emily was miserable, and as Geoffrey was not quite such a monster as most men, he was, most likely, miserable too at seeing her so.

She could not deny that he had shown himself kind and considerate, and when he came back to London alone and they saw more of him than during the spring, and she heard the thoughtfulness and love with which he spoke of his absent wife, blaming himself for not having sooner discovered the cause of her low spirits, she had to confess that there might be a few exceptions to her rule.

"At any rate," said Mabel, "you must never say a word against him before Emily again. I believe she felt more angry with you at that moment than she ever did with Mrs. Millar for all her bad treatment of her."

"There is one thing I regret not having seen," said Blanche, "and that is Mrs. Millar's face when she heard Emily was engaged to Geoffrey."

"She said she was a very unfit wife for a clergyman," replied Leila; "even more so than to be the teacher and companion of children, and that the Lord's ways were very mysterious."

"No doubt she thinks her and Geoffrey both brands ready for the burning," said Blanche; "I never once spoke to her the last time I was at Deerscourt, nor should I have gone to church only Aunt Mary made a fuss. It was, to my mind, an insult to Christianity to hear Mr. Millar preach about love and charity and all that from the pulpit, when he allowed his wife to do her best to ruin a poor girl's chances in life. Thank Heaven, the God who rules the world is not the Fetish whom such people as the Millars worship."

"Providence has been too much for Mrs. Millar this time," said Mabel, "let her talk as she will."

"She says her present governess is a 'precious person,'" said Leila laughing.

"When is Mr. Hylton coming home?" inquired Blanche.

"Soon, I hope and trust. Mrs. Hylton

is much better. I shall sing *Jubilate* the day their return is fixed."

"And where will Mr. Millar betake himself to?" said Mabel.

"To his own Rectory in Ireland, I hope, which has been having a holiday all this time."

"There to promote Christian amity between the two populations," said Blanche. "Can one wonder that Ireland is a prey to religious bigotry?"

"Are the souls of his Irish cure allowed to lie fallow while he preaches toleration to English Protestants?" asked Mabel.

"I fancy a curate is considered good enough for them," returned Leila.

Mrs. Radclyffe was very urgent for Blanche to return to Deerscourt with Leila, but the latter did not second the invitation; and though Horace wrote entreating missives begging her to come, her mother would not consent, and they decided to go to Ryde in August. In former days Mrs. Seymour always went there, and they had many friends near.

"My mother, she sent me ten miles away,"

sings the Irish girl in the ballad, while her roguish, laughing eyes challenge the audience with the question, "Could she think *that* would keep him from me?" and anon "Reilly" appears in the hay-field beside her with the *à propos* remark—

"I thought, my dear, you would want a rake,"

thereby defeating the dowager's plans.

Blanche Seymour was not allowed to go to Deerscourt in order to keep her out of Horace Radclyffe's way, but she had not been ten days at Ryde before he made his appearance. He came in one evening while they were at dinner, not, indeed, with Reilly's airy observation, yet looking as if he, at least, thought himself very much in his place beside her.

"How do you contrive to get so much leave, Horace?" asked Mrs. Seymour afterwards, not without a little inward chafing.

"I got Bruce to take my duty, Aunt Fanny, just to give me a week at the sea, and a glimpse of you all,"—a glance at Blanche.

"I suppose," remarked that young lady, demurely, "in war time her Majesty's soldiers do such good service as to compensate for their idleness in time of peace?"

"Blanche, one would think, to hear you talk, that a fellow never did anything. I've been working like a machine ever since I left London, and if one can't get

away to Scotland in August, one may surely be allowed a breath of sea air in September."

"We have been having such fun," said Mabel. "You know all the Rivers' party are here."

Horace evidently found it great fun, too. He stayed on, getting his leave prolonged in the mysterious way known only to those who hold her Majesty's Commission. It is a marvel who does whatever work is done, as the normal condition of the officers is being "on leave."

What could Mrs. Seymour do? She had taken a house for six weeks, and could not give it up because Colonel Radclyffe chose to stay at the Pier Hotel.

Neither could she forbid him to walk with them on the Strand or Pier, and when he said, "Aunt Fanny, do let me take Mabel and Blanche out in a rowing boat," how was she to refuse?

He naturally joined in all their expeditions, adding much to their pleasure, no one could deny, and after all he was no longer engaged, and if he and Blanche liked each other, why should they not marry? He was not very rich, certainly, but Mrs. Seymour had not found that money insured her own happiness, and, at all events, she would not oppose such a marriage if Blanche wished it. Whether the latter's thoughts ever went so far even Mabel did not know. That she and Horace were devoted to each other was patent to every one. Her whole face became radiant when he was with her; she never dreamed of disputing anything he really wished; and he, on his part, appropriated her entirely, taking his place so naturally beside her, that when he appeared, any other gentleman who was with her immediately gave way to him.

Every one meets every one at Ryde in the season.

Horace and Geoffrey walking one afternoon on the Pier encountered Sir George Conway arm in arm with Mr. Vivian, Horace's rival at the Winterton ball.

"Halloo, Conway, how long have you been here?" exclaimed Colonel Radclyffe.

"I'm only just arrived. I came from Cowes in my yacht. What brings you here?"

"Oh, I thought I'd just take a run down. The Seymours are here."

"Oh, indeed!" said Sir George, a certain gleam of intelligence in his eyes. "Is your sister with them?"

"No. She is at Deerscourt. They have some people staying there."

"Edythe is on board the yacht with my

aunt," said the baronet; "she would like to see your cousins. Are there any lodgings to be had here? she and my aunt are tired of Cowes, and want to come here."

Of course Horace referred him to Mrs. Seymour, and he said he would go back and bring Lady Eveleigh and Edythe ashore.

They proceeded in a body to Mrs. Seymour's house, Mr. Vivian accompanying them. He and Horace just bowed in the fashion peculiar to men who instinctively hate each other.

They found the ladies sitting in the garden, it being too hot, they said, to toil down to the Pier.

Mr. Vivian went up at once to Blanche and shook hands. Horace threw himself on the ground beside her.

"I wonder you speak to me, Mr. Vivian," she said smiling. "Do you remember how disgusted you were at my conduct about that dance?"

"Not disgusted," he answered; "I never expect a lady to keep a promise."

"Why not?"

"I don't think they understand what it means."

"Do you ever mean to marry, Mr. Vivian?"

"Certainly not."

"That is lucky; because the lady might object to your thinking her incapable of understanding the significance of some promises you would have to make mutually. May I ask if you consider yourself equally unable to keep a promise?"

"By no means; I understand what it implies."

"Oh, I comprehend," she said frowning, as if taking in some abstruse idea.

"Women are so *bornées* in their intellect; men are, of course, so much cleverer, that their superiority enables them not only to understand a promise, but very frequently also dispenses them from keeping it."

"Just that," he answered gravely without a suspicion of a joke.

Blanche never changed countenance, but the other ladies burst out laughing.

Horace apparently saw nothing to be amused at. His black face grew darker every moment, and Blanche, who watched his slightest look, turned to him and gradually brought back his good humor.

Of course he meant to withdraw in Mr. Vivian's favor, but who could listen calmly to a man insulting a lady like that? He told Blanche afterwards she ought to congratulate herself that he had not thrown him over the garden wall.

Apartments were found for Lady Eve

leigh; and then there were frequent expeditions in the *Leila*, Sir George's yacht, very enjoyable to those who did not suffer from sea-sickness.

"I hope Leila does not mind George's having called his yacht after her," said Edythe.

Mabel was obliged to confess that she doubted if Miss Radclyffe was aware of the fact; but both Blanche and Horace wrote and told her, recounting also their many pleasant gatherings on board, and Leila, dull and lonely at Deerscourt, though very glad to be out of Sir George's way, and not at all more inclined to matrimony, still did give a longing thought to the gay and happy party at Ryde. She was only twenty; and though one may have had reason to be misanthropical, yet one has some capabilities of enjoyment left at that mature age.

Neither Mabel nor her mother could stay on board the yacht for more than a quarter of an hour with any degree of comfort to themselves, but Blanche was a capital sailor, so she went with Lady Eveleigh and Edythe, and, of course, Horace went too. He privately informed her he "did not think much of Miss Conway. A good, homely sort of girl, he doubted not, but nothing more." Blanche stood up for her friend, without, however, getting him to alter his opinion.

Sometimes Mr. Vivian accompanied them; but not often. The society of ladies bored him, or he thought it did, which came to the same thing, and he acknowledged he never knew what to say to them; but he despised a man who affected singularity, so called on Mrs. Seymour, and, when he met them walking, would join them, though his efforts to lower his mind to their level fatigued him dreadfully. He regretted much that it was not the custom in western countries to shut women up in a harem, so that none but those who wished it need see them. How any man could marry and voluntarily condemn himself to perpetual association with such nonentities was a great mystery to him; yet here was Sir George Conway, otherwise a sensible fellow enough, wretched because he could not get a girl to be his wife, who had not even the brains to see what a fool she was to refuse him. There was Geoffrey Rivers, infatuated about a girl whom he had thought fit to take as a companion for life, always looking after her, though the trouble she gave him ought to have been a warning to any man against weighting himself with such an encumbrance; yet

he seemed to delight in his slavery. There was Maynard, a man whose opinion on the currency he would prefer to any one's, perpetually dangling after Mabel Seymour, though she was so stupid that he never attempted to carry on a conversation with her; and then there was Blanche—she was not only densely and inconceivably ignorant, but flippant as well, yet Radclyffe, a man who had distinguished himself in his profession, never was happy away from her. To be sure much brains did not go to the making of a soldier—privately the Honorable Percy thought all those gallant individuals were absent in a body when the commodity was announced for distribution—and Radclyffe was—he hardly knew what to call him—*fool* somehow was not applicable, though he never looked in a book. Of one thing Mr. Vivian was quite sure, and that was that he disliked him most heartily. If men were idiots enough to care about women they ought to behave well to them, whereas he had heard that Radclyffe flirted with this girl while engaged to another, that he was a man who went in solely for money, and therefore could have no intention of marrying one whose flippant tongue, enough to deave any man, and her somewhat impertinent, provoking face were her only fortune. Mr. Vivian had taken such a dislike to that face, that he found himself thinking of it at all sorts of times. What a consummate fool its owner *must* be to look so enraptured when that six-foot dolt Radclyffe was with her.

It must be explained that Mr. Maynard came to Ryde on his way to Ventnor, to see some relations there, he said; he was backwards and forwards a good deal, and very often with the Seymours.

He never alluded to the past, but would walk in silence beside Mabel, and she, contrary to her wont, was too much embarrassed to speak: she contented herself with looking wonderfully pretty, and he seemed to find pleasure in watching her lovely face with its color heightened by sea air, and her sweet eyes sparkling with health and happiness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MISS HEDGES, quondam housemaid, promoted to the rank of ladies' maid, accompanied Mrs. Seymour to Ryde.

One morning when she appeared to assist at Mabel's toilet, she imparted to her

the important piece of news that Mr. Davis, body-servant to Colonel Radclyffe, had made her an offer of his hand and heart, commodities with which she professed herself highly pleased, and had, therefore, accepted them.

Colonel Radclyffe, after the manner of all eminently impecunious men, maintained a servant of habits as expensive or even more so than his own, and never traveled without him. He frequently did not know where to turn to in order to pay his tailor's bill, though that individual showed himself the most long-suffering of his sex, but he would no more have brushed his own coat or put it into his portmanteau than he would have given up smoking, or blacked his boots. He spent money on a grand scale, but Mr. Davis's ideas were even more magnificent, and if ever a faint thought of economy crossed Horace's mind, his servant's bolder conceptions very soon put an end to it.

The great object of Mr. Davis's life was to imitate his master as closely as possible. His gait and manner were the counterpart of Horace's. In these more advanced days he would have had a moustache cut to a hair like his, but some years ago such an innovation would not have been tolerated, so he had to content himself with cultivating his whiskers in a manner which would make as great a show of hair on his face as those ornamental appendages could do, unaided by any on the lip. When he took off his hat to the ladies it was not easy, at a little distance, to tell the two apart. For the rest, he was not a bad specimen of his class, and Miss Hedges considered him the most perfect of mankind. She was supremely happy. They could not marry for some time, there was, therefore, no immediate prospect of leaving her young ladies, but the fact of a lover all to herself added infinitely to her importance. Until the arrival of Mr. Davis the divided attentions of the Jeames of Cadogan Place had been her portion—attentions which the much-perplexed individual in question had to divide between the cook, housemaid, and herself, in order to live in any sort of peace; and as prudence dictated that the cook should receive the largest share, hers was necessarily limited.

She felt no triumph over Jeames. He had done his little best, and was, she told Mabel, a good-hearted young man, but weighed in the balance with Mr. Davis he had no chance.

"He hasn't had the opportunities, you see, Miss Mabel."

Blanche communicated the fact to Horace, questioning him again as to Mr. Davis's steadiness, etc.

"I suppose he'll want me to raise his wages," was Colonel Radclyffe's comment, "though I'll be hanged if I don't find it hard enough to pay him what I do now."

Mr. Vivian, in spite of his misogyny, remained at Ryde, why he hardly knew himself, unless it was to indulge in sarcasms at the folly of his friends, and to watch all Horace's proceedings with a sort of suppressed growl. He complained bitterly that he could not even enjoy a cigar without some call on his attention, if not by a woman in person, at all events by some man infatuated about one. His chum, Sir George Conway, asked him to join him on a yachting expedition, yet here he was, dawdling away his time to be at the service of a lot of idle, useless, fine ladies.

One evening he went in search of Sir George, and found him in Horace's room, at the hotel, deep in consultation over a *route* they were trying to make out for a meditated expedition the next day. He sat down at the table, waiting till they should have done.

"Don't you see, Conway, your plan would do very well, only Blanche says we can't go from one station to the other in the time."

"I don't see why," replied Sir George. "There are twenty minutes; surely if we telegraph for flies that's enough."

"She says not, because there is a stiffish hill. It would be an awful bore to miss the train."

"Well, then, we must go the other way. It's a pity, as we shall have to get up so early."

"Where is it?" inquired Mr. Vivian.

They explained, and the whole *route* was discussed over again, that gentleman pronouncing in favor of Sir George's way.

"But, Blanche says we can't do it," said Horace rather impatiently.

Mr. Vivian shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows. "It seems to me rather unlikely that a lady should be a very competent judge," said he; "women invariable exaggerate distance."

"I'll back Blanche to be right," said Horace warmly.

"She doesn't exaggerate the distance, but she says the hill is very heavy," said Sir George soothingly, for the pair were glaring at each other like two dogs ready to spring.

"Well, if she doesn't know more about that part of the country than she does about Carisbrook, I should be sorry to be guided by her," remarked Mr. Vivian contemptuously.

"What did she say about Carisbrook?" asked Sir George in secret amusement.

"She told me she had been there, and talked such incredible rubbish about the place and its history that, upon my word, I could scarcely believe my ears."

Horace glared ferociously at him.

"What did she say?" asked Sir George.

"Ignorant as I know women to be, I was fairly amazed at the utter and hopeless jumble she made of names and dates. Why did she talk of what she knew nothing about?"

"What did she say?" repeated Sir George, his blue eyes twinkling.

"What didn't she say, rather? She told me she had always thought William I. was confined there because he wouldn't pass the Bill of Rights, and had drowned his nephew by throwing him into a butt of champagne. Conceive any one in her senses talking such a farrago of nonsense!"

The other two gentlemen burst into a roar of laughter.

"Percy," said Sir George, "take my advice, and don't talk history again with young ladies, especially with Blanche Seymour."

"Can't you fancy Blanche," said Horace, "not moving a muscle, and then telling Mabel the story!"

"How do you mean? I see nothing to laugh at," growled Mr. Vivian savagely to Horace.

"Look here, Percy," said Sir George, "the chances are a hundred to one that you don't get the worst of it if you treat a woman like a fool. Miss Seymour was just amusing herself at your expense. My aunt has a Mechanics' Institute for her people, in Devonshire, and I'm going to give a lecture there at Christmas on Charles I. and his times, so Edythe and I have been rather getting up the subject, and the day we went to Carisbrook I was talking to Blanche about it; I confess I was surprised how much she knew about the rights of the quarrel,—I mean, so much more than one would fancy a young lady could gather just from school histories and so on. She did justice, too, to Hampden and Pym, Cromwell and the rest, did she not?" he added, turning to Horace for corroboration.

Horace's ideas of English History were, it must be admitted, rather hazy. He

had a slight recollection of having learned, when a small boy, something about William the Conqueror in connection with the game laws, he thought, but beyond that he remembered nothing. He had never heard of the Bill of Rights, but as he had been to Carisbrook with Blanche, and had been present during the conversation with Sir George, he had some idea of the period in question. He had not taken part in the discussion, as there was no use in letting every one see that he could not pass an examination in English History, but he had listened attentively, feeling secretly pleased as he thought that Blanche got the best of the argument, and telling her so afterwards, asking her for what supplemental information he wanted, and he felt sure she had not said anything either of the Bill of Rights or a butt of champagne. He could, therefore, safely laugh and enjoy the joke, though had he known absolutely nothing of the subject, he would have been equally sure Blanche was right.

Mr. Vivian felt horribly disgusted. That he, the Honorable Percival Vivian, traveler, philologist, and historian, should be flouted and made fun of by a flippant girl, and this so completely that no suspicion of the fact crossed his mind, was a severe wound to his self-importance. And then, too, he was so entirely fooled as to proclaim it himself. How often before, too, may this audacious girl have pursued the same game, he totally unconscious the while. He resolved never to speak to her again. He very seldom did speak to a young lady, and would take good care when he did so in future.

He swallowed his disgust as well as he could, though Horace's triumphant and repeated laughter irritated him dreadfully, observing sneeringly "that no one but a woman would think of assuming ignorance of things she knew," after which remarkable proposition he proceeded to light a fresh cigar, and sat puffing away furiously. Of course, the two men retailed the story to Blanche the next day, dwelling much on the victim's discomfited looks.

"Really, Sir George," she said rather apologetically, "it did serve your friend right. Conceive his beginning to tell me, in his most condescending style, that Charles I. was a king of England in the seventeenth century. What could I do?"

"Percy's not half a bad fellow," replied Sir George, "but he is an awful fool in some things."

"I wish you had seen how disgusted he

looked when I asked him one day if he ever had a mother. I told him, as he despised us women folk so much, I thought he was an exception, perhaps, to the general rule."

Mr. Vivian did not face Blanche again. He left Ryde the next day, feeling how hopeless it was to attempt getting either Sir George or his yacht away from their present moorings.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN November, Leila Radclyffe, who had been ailing more or less all the autumn, became very ill, and Mrs. Radclyffe wrote to Mrs. Seymour, entreating that Blanche might go down to Deerscourt for a little while. "Charles and I beg it as an especial favor," she said; "Leila's illness is not infectious: it is a sort of intermittent fever, leaving her one day better, another worse. She cannot be moved, but the doctor says she wants cheering and amusing, and dear Blanche does brighten us all up so, that it will be not only kind of you, dear Fanny, but a work of Christian charity to let her come."

Mr. Radclyffe, moved thereto by his wife, also wrote, seconding the request. Mrs. Seymour felt she could not refuse, and Blanche, her heart secretly bounding at the thought of seeing Horace, prepared for the journey.

On arriving at Winterton she saw him awaiting her on the platform.

"Here you are, Blanche," he exclaimed joyfully. "I am so glad you are come!"

"How is Leila?"

"Only pretty well. Mother could not leave her to-day, so I have come to meet you. Davis will look after your things. Come in out of the cold."

He led her into the waiting-room, which was empty.

"What a glorious fire!" she exclaimed. "I'm so cold."

He put one hand on her shoulder, and taking one of her small ones in his other, stooped and kissed her cheek. "Blanche, you must let me—I'm so glad to see you."

The blood rushed to her face. "Horace, you ought not to do that!" she said gravely, withdrawing her hand.

"Why not, Blanche? I'm your cousin. I've neglected my privileges shamefully with you."

"No, Horace. You have done very well without these privileges, as you call them, and you are not to take them now."

"But, Blanche, I'm so glad to see you. Are you not a little glad to see me?"

"I am very glad indeed to see you, Horace," she answered, looking up frankly at him, "only you must be good."

"Well, I will, then; now, at any rate. Sit down and drink this tea," and he gave her a cup.

"How truly delightful!" she exclaimed. "Where did you get it? I did not know there was a refreshment-room here."

"Nor is there; but I told Davis to have some for you, to fortify you for the long drive to Deerscourt in the cold. Knowing your weakness, I've had a hot-water thing for your feet put into the carriage, too."

"Horace, you are too kind." And for a moment a pair of adoring eyes went up to his face. He stood and looked at her as she sat, with her pretty little feet on the fender, and then turned abruptly away to the window.

Blanche's arrival did much to cheer Leila. Constant companionship with Mrs. Radclyffe was not enlivening, to her daughter, at least. She had an object in almost all she said, plainly visible, though she flattered herself it was carefully veiled, and when she was not talking up to a subject she fell asleep.

Blanche was a boon to a sick person; gentle, bright, and knowing instinctively when to speak and when to be silent. Leila improved daily, and used to leave her bedroom and lie on the sofa in her boudoir, too weak to do anything but be amused by watching her cousin paint or work.

Sir George Conway rode over several times himself to inquire for her, and sent every day for tidings. He also occasionally ventured on the pronounced measure of begging her acceptance of grapes or flowers. Once when he came, after her arrival, Blanche went down to see him. He showed such concern about Leila, that she felt sincerely sorry for him, and provoked with her for her obstinate refusal.

"I keep on thinking, Miss Seymour," he said, "that if I had her at Leighton, I could take better care of her. Does she ever speak of me?" and his sunny blue eyes looked wistfully at her.

Blanche could say truthfully that she had spoken warmly of his kindness in inquiring for her and sending her flowers. He was quite pleased, and rode away hopefully. Of course a more magnificent bouquet than ever arrived the following day.

These were weeks of uninterrupted

happiness to Blanche. When the weather permitted she either rode or walked with Horace, and when it was unpropitious he played billiards with her. During the long winter evenings he sat in his sister's boudoir, and the confidential intimacy consequent on their constant intercourse riveted the chains round her heart, till every thought and wish and feeling became too much associated with him ever again to be separated.

She did not now write about him to Mabel. Had she done so, her letters would have been *all* Horace, and as she no longer filled them with him, she felt how tame her correspondence was, and wondered what she used to write about before.

It is true he had never said in so many words, "Blanche, I love you," but if ever human eyes and actions spoke, he told her so a hundred times a day. He anticipated her every wish, studied her tastes, and made no secret of being guided by her opinion and judgment, in all the little (and great, too) occurrences of their daily lives. She must have been blinder than the blind not to have seen his preference.

How much or how little of all this Mr. and Mrs. Radclyffe perceived it is hard to say. People are proverbially unobservant of what goes on under their own eyes. It is probable that Mr. Radclyffe saw nothing extraordinary. He liked Blanche so much himself, that he considered it natural that his son should like her too. He had his ideas of honor. He made his wife's life miserable, but he would not have trifled with a girl's affections; and as he was quite sure that "Horace would never be such a — fool as to marry on nothing," he would very promptly have spoken his mind had he suspected anything wrong.

To Mrs. Radclyffe, also, the impossibility of Horace marrying a penniless girl was so ever present, that no idea of risk arising from his intimacy with Blanche had ever entered her head till Leila spoke, and even then she was so certain of her son's prudence, that she only feared Alice Wentworth's hearing of the flirtation. No misgivings as to the girl's feelings troubled her. Like Horace, she judged her to be too sensible ever seriously to think of uniting herself to a poor man.

Blanche's happiness was rudely broken up. She had been for a walk with Horace, and on her return went up straight to Leila's boudoir, with some colored leaves for her.

"Blanche dear," said Leila, "there is

a letter for you marked 'immediate.' It is from Mabel. I do hope they don't want you home."

She tore it open, glanced over it, and then sat down without uttering a word. Just then Horace came into the room.

"Oh, Horace!" exclaimed his sister, "something has happened."

Blanche handed him the letter, watched his face while he read it, and then asked, "When is the next train?"

"Oh, Blanche, do tell me!" pleaded Leila.

Her brother gave her the missive. It was from Mabel Seymour—the crash in their monetary affairs which Blanche had long dreaded had come at last.

It appeared that no rent had been paid for some time; and after repeated and fruitless applications to Ralph on the landlord's part, there was an execution in the house and the bailiffs were now in possession. The shock, sudden and unexpected, had so affected Mrs. Seymour that she was ill in bed, and Mabel, terrified and totally ignorant what to do, wrote to the sister on whom she always relied, imploring her to return at once.

Though she always felt certain that her brother was utterly unfit for business and was mismanaging their affairs dreadfully, Blanche was as much stunned by the blow, when it came, as if she had been totally unprepared for it. She was conscious but of one thing—Horace's kindness to her and his tender care.

"Can you be ready in an hour, my child?" he said gently, taking her hand.

"Yes, quite; Adèle will put up my things."

But Mrs. Radclyffe set herself against her departure that afternoon.

"You can't travel so late, my dear, and you will arrive in London in the pitchy dark. Go by the first train to-morrow morning. What good can you do to-night?"

"What good, Aunt Mary?" and she passed her hand across her forehead; "why, be with mamma and Mabel!"

"Mother, leave her alone," said Horace. "She can go perfectly by the next train, and I will take her up. I have ordered the carriage."

But Mrs. Radclyffe continued to oppose and to make objections, to all of which Blanche listened in silence, only occasionally looking to Horace to help her out. Her aunt had a motive in wishing to detain her. She felt that the offer of pecuniary assistance was, perhaps, due—Leila was urgent on the point—but in her husband's absence she could not venture on

such a step. If Blanche would only wait till to-morrow she might "take Charles in the right way," and get him to do something, though his dislike to Ralph Seymour would, she feared, be a bar, whereas if she went now there would, she knew, be no chance of doing anything. Mr. Radclyffe was out, and would not be home till late. Conscious that her motive was kind, she was much aggrieved that the girl would not listen to her persuasions, but sat eagerly watching for the carriage, and that Horace would not say a word to dissuade her. She would not tell him her reason, for, as she informed Leila, "you never could count on what a man might do. He would be sure to tell Blanche, and then, if your father refused, it would look so bad!"

Blanche was calm and tearless. She did not know till they got to the station that Horace was coming with her. When she turned mechanically to thank him and say good-by—"Why, Blanche," he exclaimed in a voice every tone of which vibrated with reproachful tenderness, "you didn't think I should leave you to go alone?"

"I'm afraid there will be no room for you, Horace, because of those men—will there? I don't know," and again she put her hand to her head as if to steady her thoughts.

"Don't think about me. Sit down here, and let me put this rug over you;" but she could only sit bolt upright, looking pantingly out, as if the quick beatings of her own heart must hurry the passionless train.

When they reached Cadogan Place Mabel was close behind the servant who opened the door. The sisters clasped each other in silent agony.

"How is mamma?" asked Blanche.

"Asleep. They have given her morphine. Come in here."

She opened the dining-room door. It was cold and dark—the fire out, and one miserable candle flickering on the table. Blanche shuddered.

"I'll come to-morrow," whispered Horace in her ear; "I think I had better go now."

"Oh, dear Horace, don't go just yet. Do stay a little while," she implored, feeling that her misery would be doubled without him.

"It is all in confusion, Horace," said Mabel, "but I'll have a fire lighted in a minute."

"Do," said he; "Blanche is so cold."

"Are the men here, Mabel?" asked her sister, in a suppressed tone.

"No, dear, they are gone. Oh, Blanche, you don't know how kind everybody has been! I shall never forget Geoffrey and Mr. Maynard?"

"Mr. Maynard?"

"Yes; I'll tell you."

The substance of her story was this. Ralph had hinted to his mother on the preceding morning that he was in great difficulties, and had said something vague about giving up the Dye Works. He went out, as men do, leaving anxious hearts behind them, and in the afternoon the bailiffs took possession of the house. The shock prostrated Mrs. Seymour, and Mabel wrote to Geoffrey, begging him to come at once, as she did not know where Ralph was, and had no idea what ought to be done.

Geoffrey was at St. Hilda's when the messenger reached Spanish Place. Emily opened the note, and was so alarmed at its contents that in her surprise she communicated them to Mr. Maynard, who was calling on her at the moment. "And, Blanche, he has been so kind! He offered in the most generous way to do anything he could, Emily says. He was coming straight here, and then thought we might not like it, and went to Uncle Rivers, and then they and Emily came on here."

On their arrival they found Mabel wild with grief and terror, having just got a note from her brother written from Whitecross Street. He had been arrested for a sum of two hundred pounds, and urged her, in despair, to apply to his uncle.

Mr. Rivers discharged the debt to the landlord, in order to free his sister's house from the bailiffs. One of those individuals informed him that there were a number of writs out against his nephew.

"Oh, Uncle Rivers," said Mabel, tears streaming down her face, "what are we to do? how can we get darling Ralph out of that dreadful place?"

"I'm blest if I know what to do!" exclaimed the old gentleman, in much perplexity. "If I pay this, they are sure to have him again the minute he is out."

Mabel sank in despair on the sofa. Her ideas of a prison were derived chiefly from graphic descriptions of the dungeons of the Inquisition in Spain, which she had studied in a work entitled "The Bulwark of Protestantism," that had been given to her in the days of her youth to instill into her mind a holy horror of Popery and all such evil devices.

Mr. Maynard went up to her, as she sat, her head buried in the cushions, sob-

bing bitterly. "Miss Seymour, don't cry: pray don't. I'll go and see your brother, and it will be all right."

"Oh, will you? how truly kind! and shall you be able to get him out?"

"Yes; only don't cry and distress yourself," and he looked at her, his honest eyes full of compassion.

She did not comprehend at the moment that getting him out of prison implied the payment of the debt by Mr. Maynard, or she might have demurred. The idea of pecuniary assistance from a stranger, and that stranger a discarded lover, would have been repugnant to her nature.

Mr. Maynard went off at once; satisfied the claims of the Jew, but, as Mr. Rivers foretold, the moment Ralph emerged from durance he was pounced upon again, though, fortunately for his deliverer's pocket, not for so large a sum as the first. This, too, was paid, and with great difficulty he got into a cab, and was by this time, they hoped, safe at Boulogne or Dieppe.

"And didn't he come home at all?" inquired Blanche.

"No; we never saw him. It is too dreadful!"

"It is lucky he's off," said Horace. "Those scoundrels would have had him again as sure as fate."

Blanche could not view it in that light. She was too just not to blame her brother, though she would not say much now he was in trouble.

"They have a right to their money, Horace," she observed.

They were all three standing by the table in the dimly-lighted room as Mabel told this sad story.

"Can I see mamma?" asked Blanche.

"No, dear. The doctor says not to-night, unless she asks for you. She is to be kept very quiet. She knows Ralph is gone. Oh, Blanche, isn't it dreadful such a thing happening to her twice in her life?"

"And is all your money gone, Mabel?"

"Everything is gone, Blanche," replied her sister with the calmness of despair. "The clerk to whom Ralph trusted all at the Works latterly has absconded with the money borrowed to carry them on. I don't rightly understand all about it, but Mr. Maynard and Uncle Rivers say the Works never can have paid at all, and it seems the poor fellow went on borrowing money, always hoping things would improve: and, of course," she added with a burst of tears, "now he is down they say everything he did was wrong, and they

go on about my money! As if I cared about it, only for you and mamma. Oh, Blanche! what shall we do about dear mamma?"

It was indeed a sad prospect. Try as Mabel would to gloss over her brother's conduct, it was impossible to palliate it, and his uncle and Geoffrey applied very strong terms to him. He had not paid numerous large bills which he had requested his mother to give him that he might settle them, as he said; he had sunk money uselessly in publishing a novel at his own expense, and in bringing out a costly edition of his translations.

"He had better have stuck to his Dye Works," said Horace; "who the—I mean, who cares for translations?"

Mabel suddenly remembered Horace's request about the fire, and went to order it in the drawing-room. Blanche sat down on the sofa and buried her face in her hands in speechless despair. Horace looked on uneasily. He had seen his mother cry often enough in her numerous troubles, but this silent manifestation of sorrow was a totally different thing, and much harder to witness. He went over and stood beside her for a minute or two, and then laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Blanche, it's an awful facer, there is no denying that; but Ralph is safe out of the way, and when they look into things perhaps something may be saved. Won't you look up? for my sake, do, Blanche."

She raised her face, pale and cold as marble;—such an appeal would have brought her back from the gates of Death. He tried to take her hat off, and got the elastic twisted in her hair, as is the way on such occasions. With many soft caressing words he strove to console her, and in spite of her misery sunshine gleamed in her heart. Mabel came back and found him still standing with his hand on her shoulder.

"There is a fire in the drawing-room and some food," she said; "come out of this room. I hate it, for those dreadful men were here."

They went up-stairs and persuaded Mabel herself to eat something. She confessed she had not tasted a morsel all day.

"I feel better now you are come, Blanche. I didn't know what to do without you."

"But you have not been alone all day, dear?"

"Oh, no; Emily and Geoffrey and Aunt

Eleanor came quite early. Uncle Rivers and Mr. Maynard went down to the Works. They say everything is in utter confusion there."

"I suppose they will get rid of them?" asked Horace.

"Yes. Everything must be sold, and this house given up. Of course we must repay Uncle Rivers and Mr. Maynard."

When Horace went away the two sisters sat late into the night, talking the whole thing over, and it was very evident that Mr. Maynard's conduct had gone far to win Mabel's heart.

He had shown much generosity and delicacy—offering money as a loan, he said, to free them from their present difficulties, to be repaid when Ralph should have retrieved his affairs. But Mrs. Seymour would not accept it. Her faith in her son was too much shaken, and Mr. Rivers bluntly said "it was useless to think of his ever repaying anything."

It is needless to describe the misery of the next three months. To those who have ever gone through such an ordeal description is useless, and to those who have not, words cannot convey an iota of the suffering, heart-sickness, and sense of degradation consequent on it.

The blow had so completely aged and shaken Mrs. Seymour that it was not likely she would ever really recover it. Almost everything they had was sold to satisfy the claims of the numerous creditors, who cropped up as if by magic on every side. Bills which Ralph had given his mother to understand had been long paid came pouring in. It was found that he had raised money in all directions.

The Works were sold, and with the sum thus realized, among many other debts, that to Mr. Maynard was liquidated. Mabel was especially urgent on this point.

Now that they were deprived of Ralph's salary, a house even of the size of the one they had occupied before his ill-starred speculation was out of the question. They went from Cadogan Place to Mr. Rivers's house in Manchester Square, until some suitable lodging could be found for them, as Mrs. Seymour firmly refused to live permanently with her brother; and in this decision her daughters thoroughly acquiesced.

When all was paid, Mrs. Seymour had nothing left but her own two hundred a year, and as Ralph had not a penny, she sent a large portion of the half-year's payment to him at Boulogne. Not the smallest of her trials was hearing the severe comments on his conduct on all sides. Mabel

never uttered a reproach, and even Blanche would not cast a stone at him now he was down, but other people were not, naturally, so forbearing. Mrs. Seymour would herself condemn him freely, but it was hard to hear others do so; and though common sense forbade her to take his part, she suffered none the less at hearing him condemned. He was her son—her only one—let him be what he might. Mr. Rivers was too angry to interest himself in any way in getting him employment, and gave no invitation to him to his house; nor could Geoffrey bring himself to do so at first; but a sense of duty and his wife's representations combined, at last induced him to ask him to stay with him till he could get something to do.

Had he come back penitent it would have made some amends for the suffering he had caused, but he was as assuming and self-confident as ever. His mother and Mabel said he felt more than he showed. If so, he was clever in concealing the workings of his mind.

Mr. Maynard again proved himself a true friend by getting him a situation, though it was a difficult matter, for Ralph made as many objections as if he had been conferring a favor by accepting help from his friends; but Mr. Maynard was unwearied in his exertions, and once more he had a chance in life, if he would only use it.

He was indignant at the idea of his mother going into lodgings, and protested vehemently that with his assistance a house could be taken; but this time she was firm. She shook her head gravely and sadly.

"No, Ralph. I will run no more risks. Keep out of debt, that is all. Your sisters and I will manage by ourselves."

He then tried to enlist the young ladies on his side. Since his return Blanche had carefully avoided any discussion with him, till now when he sought to use her influence to gain his point.

"It is not respectable for you and mother to live in a lodging," he urged.

"It is always respectable to be honest, Ralph," she said, stung by his tone of assumed superiority, after all his folly.

He blazed out into furious wrath. "What do you mean by using such a word to me?" he stammered.

"I made no reference to you, Ralph, as you must very well know. I say we can't afford a house, and it would be dishonest to take one."

"With my help you could," he said a little more calmly.

Blanche's lip curled.

"No, Ralph, I will never urge such a plan on mamma."

"You talk of expense, Blanche, yet you make mother keep that girl Jane."

"Certainly. Mamma must have a maid. We all like Jane, and she wishes to stay. We must have a servant of some sort."

"You argue like a woman," he said contemptuously. "What has her liking to stay got to do with it?"

"Of course I argue like a woman," she answered hotly. "I am a woman; you wouldn't have me argue like a man, would you?"

"I'd have you argue with a little common sense."

"Your sex monopolizes that commodity, no doubt," retorted Blanche, and then felt ashamed of herself for being angry at his folly. She never could keep her temper with him. He was of that class of men, inherently weak, who endeavor to magnify themselves by depreciating women. "That's just like a woman" was a phrase constantly in his mouth. Undoubtedly, according to such men, Providence was guilty of a most stupid blunder when it created Eve. Is there no uninhabited island to which they could be relegated, where they might uninterruptedly enjoy each other's society and cynicism? The civilized world would be all the pleasanter for their absence.

"It is enough to provoke a saint," said Blanche to Emily afterwards, "to hear Ralph, after having ruined us all, talk as if I have no right to an opinion because I'm a woman, when if my advice had been taken all this would never have happened."

"The fact of his talking so makes anything he says worthless to my mind," said Emily. "Geoffrey told me he was afraid he is one of those men destined to be the plague of every one connected with him—the women especially."

"My blood boils to see him smoking the most expensive cigars and going about in cabs at mamma's expense! What would be said of Mabel or me if we spent her money in that selfish way?"

"I think some men have no honor about money," said Emily. "It is just like my brother Tom. So long as he has what he wants he doesn't care where it comes from."

"He has no more right to smoke those cigars," went on Blanche, "than I have to buy expensive lace or a velvet jacket. Either they are not paid for, or they are

paid for by depriving mamma of necessities. He talks about arguing like a woman. Which is worst, I wonder,—to argue like a woman or to act with the base selfishness of a man?"

Seeing her excitement, Emily was silent, but she *looked* defense of *her* man. Blanche kissed her. "I don't mean Geoffrey, dear: I know he's very splendid; but I feel so wretched at seeing mamma and Mabel suffer that it makes me cross. I'll go up-stairs and see if solitude will restore my equanimity."

During all these troubles the Seymours saw a great deal of Mr. Maynard, and when he had to talk about business and important matters he showed to much more advantage than when he came merely as a visitor. His shyness wore off, and when he became more accustomed to the ways of young ladies he lost the awkwardness which used to mark his manner, to Mabel especially.

In proportion as he got less shy she grew more so. Anxiety and trouble had subdued her high spirits and playful demeanor. She no longer indulged in the lively raillery which had formerly delighted her lover as much as it puzzled him. He regretted the change, and would have been content to undergo the fire of her mischievous sallies again could he have seen the old bright smile and sprightly ways once more. Her face still "made a sunshine in a shady place," but it was a "sunshine often mixed with rain" now. She had learned to love Mr. Maynard sincerely; not, indeed, with the intense, romantic passion which Blanche entertained for Horace Radclyffe, but still with a deep, abiding steadfastness. He had none of the *glamour* about him which threw a magic charm over every trifling act of that distinguished *militaire*, but though his love was homely, it would stand the wear and tear of life, and a woman might safely trust it.

Through all that sad and weary Christmastide he had been unceasing in his efforts to render the rough road they had to travel as smooth as was possible under the circumstances, and his patience with Ralph's unreasonableness and affectation won Mabel's eternal gratitude.

A day or two after that troublesome individual had undertaken his new duties Mr. Maynard called to inquire how he had got on. He found Mabel alone in the drawing-room. She spoke hopefully of her brother, not exultingly, as would formerly have been the case. Then she went on, "Indeed, Mr. Maynard, I don't

know how to thank you enough for all your kindness to him. What we should have done without you I cannot think."

"Pray, Miss Seymour, don't say a word. If you only knew the pleasure it gives me."

"But I must thank you; if not now, I must do so by letter. I suppose you wouldn't burn that till you had read it?"

"Nor then either. I should value it too much."

"You see," she proceeded gravely, "Uncle Rivers was too angry to do anything for him, and Geoffrey had no interest. Horace Radclyffe did his best, and has been most kind, but Ralph was not fit for anything he could have got him, so without you I really do not know how we should have managed." She held out her hand to him as he stood opposite to her. He raised it to his face, for he can hardly be said to have touched it with his lips—a feat of gallantry which surprised himself immensely when he thought over it afterwards.

"I have listened, as you wished; but might I ask you never to allude to the subject again?"

"Well, I won't, but I shall always think of it. I must tell you now, that I hope Geoffrey has found us apartments. He has been trying to get them close here, but it is impossible. However, he has made out some he thinks will do near the Regent's Park."

"That is a long way off, isn't it? I mean a long way from your uncle."

"What can we do? besides, after all, it might be worse. Mamma thought of Camden Town."

"Won't you sit down?" he asked abruptly. As she complied he walked to the window and back again uneasily.

"Miss Seymour, I came to propose a plan to your mother—but as she is out, I will venture to name it to you, trusting you will use your influence with her to get her to adopt it."

She looked inquiringly at him. He colored and fumbled with his gloves and hat, which he had taken up in his nervousness.

"There's my house in —shire, with only a lot of servants in it who are eating their own heads off. I shall be in town all the summer, of course, and if you would so far honor me as to make use of it, I should feel you were really doing me a favor."

Tears were never very far from Mabel's eyes now, and they rushed to them at this moment.

"Mr. Maynard, such an offer is like your usual kindness. I will tell mamma what you say."

"You see," he went on, encouraged to a little persuasion by her acquiescence, "you will find living in lodgings very trying during the hot weather, and if you wait till later in the year you may find some to suit you nearer here."

Mrs. Seymour received the offer with a full appreciation of the generosity which prompted it, but declined it, for many obvious reasons.

Mr. Maynard accepted the refusal with less disappointment than she had anticipated. As he made the proposition in perfect good faith, of course he meant it to be accepted, but as it was declined it left him free to do, on the first convenient opportunity, what he had fully resolved to do at some time, viz. repeat the question he had once before put to Mabel with such bad success.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE Seymours had removed into a lodging in Albany Street, and the two girls set themselves to make it as comfortable as they could, and to let their mother feel the change as little as might be.

Mabel again took to making and mending, and Blanche helped Jane with the beds, and dusted the furniture. They resolutely tried to look on the bright side, but it was not easy, though no complaint ever escaped them before their mother.

Mr. Rivers had given them a piano, and evening after evening the pair played and sang, thus wiling her into temporary forgetfulness of all her troubles. She was passionately fond of music, and none but those to whom it is a passion can understand the solace it affords, or the soothing power it exercises. Sisters' voices have a magical power of blending harmoniously, and these two carried balm to Mrs. Seymour's heart as they mingled in the duets they sang so perfectly, or as Blanche poured forth the simple ballads in which she excelled. She lay on the sofa with her eyes closed, and secretly felt that the angels' music of another sphere would not be so sweet to her ears as this to which she was listening.

"How thankful we ought to be for our voices!" said Blanche; "I don't know what mamma would do of an evening if we could not sing."

Mrs. Seymour had been better since they had settled down in their lodging. They could have not gone there at a better time.

The Regent's Park is charming during April and the beginning of May, before the delicate green of the trees has got grimed and dingy by smoke and fog. No country trees ever put on so exquisite a coloring to greet the spring as these sooty London ones! But it is a short-lived beauty, and may seem the brighter, perhaps, from contrast with the surrounding blackness, as no sky—that is, no English sky—ever looks so blue as a London one when it is blue.

Mrs. Rivers came every day and took her sister-in-law for a drive, and Mr. Maynard called frequently with all sorts of offers of service. He left them every time more impressed by the courage with which they bore such a sudden reverse, though the sources whence they derived comfort amazed him exceedingly.

"It is such a blessing," said Blanche to him one day, "that we have a church which we all like so much as Christ Church so near us! The distance suits mamma exactly."

This puzzled him much, and after mature reflection he arrived at the novel conclusion that, after all, men and women are so different that it is no use arguing from one to the other.

Mr. and Mrs. Radclyffe sent a warm invitation to Mrs. Seymour and her daughters to go to Deerscourt, and Horace came up to second it in person, but in vain. Then, would Blanche go back with him? Leila was still very delicate, and wanted her much.

No. Blanche would not leave her mother and sister in their trouble; but Horace's visit was a happy episode in her present life, and when he went his almost daily letters were a continual source of pleasure.

Mabel was the one who most apparently felt the change. When too late she regretted her own weakness in ever having trusted Ralph with the money which might have made her mother comfortable for life, and constantly deplored her want of judgment to her sister. Blanche, whose generous spirit was incapable of "I told you so," did her best to cheer her.

"My heart is broken when I think of mamma without sea air," said Mabel, tears springing to her eyes.

"But Geof has been saying, dear, that he means to take Emily to Ryde again in August; she liked it last year; and he wants us to join them there for a month."

"We can't go there at his expense for all that time. Mamma would not do it."

"I told him so, but he was quite angry. He says he and Emily are looking forward to it, and that it will be culpable pride on my part if I make mamma refuse. I never saw him so serious about anything. He gave me quite a lecture on the sin of false pride," and she laughed, "and said it was not as if they were poor and could not afford it."

They did go to Ryde, but under different circumstances than they now anticipated.

Mr. Maynard had made several pilgrimages to Albany Street at abnormal hours—his duties as a senator were a sad *gêne* to him at this time—in hopes of finding Mabel alone. Hitherto he had never succeeded. They had but one sitting-room, and Mrs. Seymour was too infirm to move much off the sofa, on which she lay the greater part of the day in her black satin dress and cap with white ribbons, which it was her daughter Mabel's pride to keep always fresh and clean, wrapped in her Shetland shawl, looking like a beautiful, faded lily, her face so pale and calm amidst all her troubles. There her girls tended and guarded her, and Ralph, who with his many faults had one redeeming quality, his love for his mother, came and saw her almost every day. But on one occasion Fate favored Mr. Maynard. Blanche was gone to spend the day with Emily Rivers, and when he arrived he found Geoffrey sitting by Mrs. Seymour's sofa. Mabel was working, looking pale and delicate. He made a bold stroke.

"Miss Seymour, you look as if a walk would do you good. Will you come with me and see the new seal at the Zoological Gardens?"

She shook her head. "Thanks; no. I wouldn't leave mamma."

"I intend inflicting myself on Aunt Fanny," said Geoffrey, "for some time longer. My wife orders me to keep out of my own house all the morning, as she wants to have Blanche to herself, so I've nowhere to go if you won't give me house-room, and I'll take care of her."

"You said you wanted to see the seal," said Mr. Maynard. "I think you might trust your mother to him."

"My child, I need nothing," said Mrs. Seymour smiling, "only you and Blanche insist on thinking I want watching like a baby. Go for a walk, darling; it will do you good."

A year ago Mrs. Seymour would not

have allowed such a proceeding, but Mr. Maynard had shown himself such a true friend that conventionality might well give way to him.

Mabel went up-stairs and presently returned in the smallest and flimsiest of bonnets made by herself, looking very lovely in spite of her pallor.

They walked up to the Gardens and *did* the various and odoriferous beasts; then as they were standing alone beside the water where the beavers ought to be visible but never are—an amiable peculiarity characterizing many of the animals, those especially you have come with the express object of seeing—he said, “Miss Seymour, do you ever change your mind?”

“Yes; very often.”

“I never do,” he said with great solemnity.

“I’m very sorry to hear it.”

This was most unpropitious.

“Why?” he inquired, looking very blank.

“Because I think people who never change their minds are very”—disagreeable, she was going to say, but stopped.

“I mean,” he went on, not heeding her unfinished sentence, “that if I once like a person I never change.”

“Oh,” said Mabel, with which expressive interjection she got very red indeed.

“I’m glad to think you do sometimes change yours,” he went on, “as that makes me hope—at least—to be plain, Miss Seymour, I asked you two years ago a question—do you remember?”

“I remember,” said Mabel, looking at the water and wondering if he really thought she had forgotten.

“Your answer was a bitter disappointment,—more so than you can, perhaps, believe.”

“I didn’t mean to give you pain,” she remarked, coloring still more deeply, as he paused, thinking he expected her to say something.

“I’m sure not—sure not; you were as kind as you could be about it, but it did pain me very deeply. If I ask you the same question now can you give me a different answer?”

“I should be most ungrateful if I could not, after all your kindness.”

Mr. Maynard had not very much romance in his disposition, nor was he given to feminine psychology, still he would rather have had some other reason.

“I don’t want gratitude,” he said, his face falling. “I hoped that, perhaps,—that you might—in fact”—he came to a full stop, completely at a loss for words.

“I can’t help feeling grateful to you,” said Mabel; “you have been so good to mamma and my brother.”

“It was a pleasure to me; and if you could only like me a little”—he stopped again.

“But I do,” she said in a very low voice, twisting up the tassel of her parasol.

“You don’t mean only because you say—because you think that I’ve been—I’ve been what you call kind?” he asked, stammering very much and looking at her.

She glanced at him for a moment with her violet eyes.

“No—not only for that.”

His face became radiant. “And will you promise to be my wife?”

“Yes; if you wish it,” the last words with a spark of her old playful manner.

It may be presumed that they paid no more attention to the animals, though they walked about for some time; and Mabel, anxious to relieve her conscience, and being naturally frank, managed to convey to her lover’s mind one of her reasons for refusing him before, though she very honestly confessed it was not the only one.

“But did you think I wanted you for the sake of your money?”

“Oh no; I knew you didn’t; only I thought you ought to have it, and I didn’t know if Ralph would be able to give it then. I have nothing now,” she added mournfully.

“I have enough for us both,” he said kindly. “You won’t want to put the marriage off very long, will you? and then, you know, your mother and Blanche can come and stay with you in your own house,” and he smiled.

They went home, where Geoffrey was still on guard. Mabel wished him elsewhere, as Mr. Maynard asked her to tell her mother at once, and it was trying to have to make the announcement before two men.

“Well,” said he, his eyes twinkling suspiciously, “did you see the seal?”

“He wouldn’t show, of course. It’s a way those Zoological animals have.”

“And what did you do, then?” he went on, still looking at her.

“Geoffrey, how curious you are! Go home and take care of Emily. I’m sure it’s time.”

He laughed, and her lover came to her assistance.

“I think we may let him into the secret,” he said, coming up to the sofa and taking Mabel’s hand. “Mrs. Sey-

mour, I am glad to tell you that she has promised to be my wife."

"That comes of going to see seals and such like monstrosities," said Geoffrey, as Mabel knelt beside her mother and buried her burning face in her shawl, under cover of kissing her.

Mrs. Seymour felt a great weight lifted off her mind. The future of her girls had troubled her much lately, as she found her own health declining. Ralph was a broken reed to trust to, and she had little to leave them but her blessing, which, though a valuable legacy always, is not substantial.

But with such a man as Charles Maynard as a husband to Mabel and a brother to Blanche, she would go in peace to her last home.

"You will have the best and prettiest wife in England," said Geoffrey, shaking his hand, "always excepting my own little property. And, Mabel, you will have the best fellow in the world for your husband."

"We are well matched, then," she returned.

"I must kiss her, you know, Maynard. I always do, remember, but this is something extra, by way of congratulation."

Mr. Maynard laughed, bethinking himself that he had not yet enjoyed that privilege himself.

"Well, Blanche," said Geoffrey, when he got home, "while you have been philandering here after my wife, a wolf has come and stolen your lamb."

"Geoffrey! And is it all settled? Oh, Emily, I must go home at once."

"Not at all. My mother is going to fetch Aunt Fanny and Mabel, and you are all going to dine here, Maynard included, if he can contrive to snatch himself from the service of an ungrateful country."

"Geoffrey, dear, I have not dinner for so many."

"Then order it, my little one. There's plenty of time."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. MAYNARD and Mabel were married in July.

In September the whole party assembled again at Ryde, but with some changes. Mabel insisted on her mother and sister staying with her, so Emily asked Leila Radclyffe to come to her.

Horace brought her down, and she had an opportunity of judging for herself of the married lives of her friends.

No such period of probation as Emily Rivers had gone through fell to Mabel Maynard's lot. She could not be homesick, for she was not separated from her mother and sister.

"Better be an old man's darling than a young man's slave" is the proverb, which may or may not be, as people think.

Mr. Maynard was not an old man, but the disparity of years between him and Mabel was so great as to make him feel some of that absorbing devotion which an elderly man entertains for a young wife. He was literally a prey to his own happiness, and lived in a sort of surprised ecstasy. It was such a new experience in his life to have this bright creature flitting about him, sitting on his knee, routing him out of his old bachelor ways, kissing him and scolding him by turns! Then she called him "Charlie." He had been "Charles" in a most solemn and pompous tone all his days to his mother and his two maiden sisters, both older than himself, and had always been treated with the reverence due, in the estimation of those worthy ladies, to the Member for the County and a magistrate, and when he heard himself addressed as "you dear boy," and the clear, joyous young voice calling "Charlie" through the house, he could hardly believe it was he who was meant. Mabel's sprightly, playful manner had all come back, and she teased him and plagued him to his heart's content.

Sir George Conway was at Cowes with his yacht, but when Edythe heard Blanche Seymour was at Ryde she expressed a wish to go there, and Lady Eveleigh, who lived only to gratify her, promised to migrate thither as soon as they could get a house.

Mr. Radclyffe had demurred very much to Leila's going to stay with a parson. He repeated frequently "that he objected to parsons on principle," but his wife could become ferocious on the subject of her children, and she protested that if he refused to allow Leila to go to the sea, which she so much needed, she would take her there herself.

Now, the worthy gentleman's theory was that only counter-jumpers and money-grubbers, who knew not the delights of grouse-shooting and had neither partridges nor pheasants of their own to gladden their hearts in the shortening September and misty October days, ever went to the sea. *Gentlemen* confined

themselves to rural pleasures. He would have felt eternally disgraced in his own eyes had he been seen, in nautical costume, perambulating the esplanade of some fashionable bathing-place. Naturally and maritally he would not allow his wife to enjoy that which he could not appreciate. It is true the total change of air and scene would have cheered and invigorated the worn, much objurgated creature, but what of that? she was his wife, his slave, bound to have no existence but in him, and "what did women want gadding about? let 'em stay at home and mind their business!" Besides, although he bullied and tormented her when she was with him—he had lucid intervals, however—he was miserable if she was away; perhaps, as his daughter observed, because he had no one to torture: so he consented to Leila's going.

"If there must be parsons, I suppose Rivers is as good a specimen as you could have."

She went unwillingly in one way, for she dreaded meeting Sir George Conway; still she had been terribly dull and wretched through the winter and spring, and could not but be glad to join a party of gay young people, the masculine portion of whom were endowed with tolerable tempers.

Horace was there, too, and he and Blanche were as inseparable as ever. Mr. Maynard and Geoffrey began to shake their heads over the matter, and said he ought either "to come to the point or else sheer off at once;" but men are terrible moral cowards, and though they will condemn each other's conduct freely, the delinquent being absent, it is a rare thing to find one brave enough to hold out a word of warning to a brother. "Am I my brother's keeper?" *could* only have been said by a man. "I think it's shameful, but it is no business of mine, you know," is the anodyne they apply to any faint pricks of conscience they may feel; and so, though his friends privately acknowledged that they feared he "was playing fast and loose," nothing was said.

Mrs. Seymour and Mabel never entertained a doubt as to his ultimate intentions. He was poor, they knew, and that made him hesitate about speaking, but seeing him and Blanche together as they did, how could they believe him either base enough or courageous enough to throw her over in the face of all her family? Mabel was so confident, that she laughed to scorn some mild doubts expressed by her husband.

Emily Rivers was the only one of the ladies who saw the whole thing clearly, and her opinion was confirmed by Leila Radclyffe.

That young lady had not been two days in the house before Emily became aware that she did not approve of her brother's conduct, though her excessive fear of him kept her from commenting openly on it.

For some time Mrs. Geoffrey Rivers kept her observations to herself. Like Leila, she was very much afraid of Horace, and shrank from meddling with him in any way; but Blanche was her friend, who had helped her in many a sad hour, her Geoffrey's sister in all but the name, and she could not stand by and see her injured without putting out a hand to help her.

She was sitting one morning on a pile of cushions on the drawing-room floor, looking out on the sparkling, glinting sea, like a small sultana, and on her lap she held a beautiful baby about six months old. Leila was on the sofa reading when Geoffrey came into the room, his hands in his pockets, and in the most unclerical of costumes. He stopped opposite her and stood looking down at her. "What are you doing, little one?"

"Well, Geoffrey, I don't think I'm doing anything but just playing with baby."

"You never do anything else, it seems to me. I'm getting quite jealous of that little chap, Emily. Now you've got him you don't care a straw for me."

"Oh, Geoffrey! you are so tall, it quite makes my eyes ache to look up at you. Do sit down. I want to talk to you."

He threw himself on the floor beside her.

"Do you hear, Em? you don't care a bit for me now."

"Look, Geoffrey, do you see what lovely eyes he has got? just like yours."

"How do you know what my eyes are like? you never look at them now."

"We won't answer him, my baby, will we, when he talks such nonsense? We should know every look in them if we never saw them again," and she held the baby up and kissed it without looking at Geoffrey.

Leila, watching them, thought that, perhaps, after all, Emily was not so very miserable; now, at all events. She got up to leave the room, thinking they wanted to speak, and Emily said, "Leila, if you are going up-stairs, will you send nurse

down to take baby? Geoffrey teases so when I have him."

"Upon my word, Emily, I call that good! I tease so! when I'm thankful for any little share of attention I get, now that you and my father and mother never think of anything but this baby."

"You don't care for him a bit."

For all answer he took the child in his arms.

"Oh, Geoffrey, do see; he knows you quite well."

"He's a wonderful child, I'm convinced. There never was such another."

When this marvel had been duly confided to his nurse, Emily turned to her husband. "Geoffrey, what do you think of Horace Radclyffe?"

"That he's not such a lucky fellow as I am. He hasn't got a dear little mite of a wife. Why did the Sea-Anemone go away?"

"I suppose she thought we wanted to talk."

"Perhaps she thought we wanted to quarrel. I hope you tell her we fight dreadfully."

"I don't. Geof! I am very sorry she has led such an unhappy life as to make her have such ideas. People don't think other people bad unless they have had a miserable experience themselves. I pity her very much."

"Your small person contains much wisdom, my wife."

"Then will you profit by it, Geoffrey?" and there followed a long discussion about Horace and Blanche, in which Emily tried to persuade her husband to interpose in some way in the latter's behalf. He could not see it, but suggested that she should warn Blanche herself, and advise her to discourage Horace's attentions.

"It would do no good, Geoffrey. She wouldn't believe a word I could say. Besides, it would be unfair. It would be putting all the hard work on her. How could she discourage him if she likes him so much? and he is always doing everything to please her."

"I suppose she does like him," said he reflectively.

"She worships him. You have only to watch her face when he comes into the room to see that."

"I say, Emily, do you think the Sea-Anemone will ever be brought to look enraptured when Sir George comes into the room?"

"I wish you wouldn't talk about the Sea-Anemone now, but do something about dear Blanche."

But he was not willing to do anything, nor anxious that she should either. "It was a bad business," he said, "but he feared it would do no good to interfere."

"Nevertheless I shall speak to Horace, if you won't," she said.

"Why to him, Emily?"

"Because it is no use speaking to her. If she attended to me she could only be cold to him, and that would affront him, and she would be miserable at seeing him angry. He would insist on knowing her reasons, and it would end in a lover's quarrel—for, of course, she would not tell the real reason—which would leave them greater friends than ever."

"How come you to know so much about lovers' quarrels? you swore to me you never had a lover but myself, and, I'm sure, we never quarreled."

"Geoffrey, the worst of you is, you never can be serious for two minutes together. One may know about a thing without having gone through it. One has instincts. Besides, we have quarreled since we've been married, and it's much the same thing, I suppose."

Now, this duty that Emily had voluntarily undertaken of speaking to Horace was one that frightened herself very much. She stood in great dread of him, and, young as she was, she knew that nine times out of ten interference, though it may seem manifestly a duty, does at least as much harm as good: but her heart ached for her friend, and she courageously resolved to prevent her being victimized any further, if she could.

Meantime, while he was the subject of so much disquietude, Horace was revolving many things in his own mind. The legacy left him by Sir Henry Wentworth had been merely a stop-gap; he was deeply in debt again, and his creditors were becoming very clamorous. A rich wife was his only resource. It was nearly two years since Alice's death; he therefore thought seriously of providing himself with one, and during this visit to Ryde it struck him that Miss Conway was in every respect suitable to fill that enviable post. He was quite aware that his name was being coupled with Blanche's very frequently, and the best way to discountenance that was to espouse some one else. The idea of marrying her never for a moment entered his head.

Had he been his brother Charles, with the Deerscourt property entailed on him, he felt that she was the one woman in the world he should choose for a wife,

"but he was a poor devil of a younger son, with nothing but his pay and what his father was pleased to give him. He knew people might say he had been attentive to Blanche—too attentive, perhaps—but he defied any one to accuse him of having acted dishonorably. He had never hinted such a thing as marriage to her. He was engaged to another woman when first he became acquainted with her, and no one knew better than she did his lamentable impecuniosity. It is true he loved her. In all his anxieties and troubles his thoughts naturally turned to her. She was to him cleverer, better, more beautiful than any girl he had ever seen, and it was his hard destiny that he could not have her as his companion for life—but the world was a hard place, he argued, and very few could have just what they liked."

He did not quite forget that she had feelings too, though his chief pity was for himself. He could not but know she loved him: her face was easy enough to read; and as he was by no means utterly heartless, though he was calculating and somewhat cold, he experienced a keen pang as he saw in imagination the rapturous look of delight with which she always greeted him. She might—no doubt she would—feel his marriage deeply, but he would suffer, too, so they were quits there. He would swear to love and cherish another woman, but that was nothing—he would soon school himself to forget Blanche except as a very dear friend;—a man must be a fool to go on crying for the moon—and then he comforted himself by the reflection that, as she was plucky as well as sensible, her courage would enable her to bear the blow bravely and get over it soon, and he felt sure that no word of censure on him would ever pass her lips. In fact, she could not blame him. He had never said a syllable that could by any possibility be wrested to his disadvantage. He had always told her he would not interfere with an eligible candidate for her favor, and he had not done so. He gave way to that fellow, Vivian, much as it cost him, because he would not stand in her light, though he could never believe she could be induced to like such an idiot; and as he did not interfere with her, so, of course, she could not object to his trying his luck with the heiress, Miss Conway, though he had no intention of relinquishing his friendship with her till absolutely compelled to do so.

So he argued the matter to himself, by all of which it is apparent that he had his feelings under admirable control.

No remorse for what he had done crossed his mind. He was sorry for Blanche; but that he had done wrong to win a heart which he meant to fling away when it suited himself never occurred to him.

The process of "giving way to Vivian" was a sore trial to Blanche. She did not understand it, and it had cost her many bitter tears since that gentleman's arrival at Ryde. He constantly came with Sir George, drawn to her, apparently, by some irresistible attraction. At first she was so amused at his misogynyism that she used to talk to him and endeavor to draw him out, but Horace manifested such extreme anger at this that she desisted, and would hardly speak to him. This displeased him equally, so that she did not know what to do, and became nervous and anxious from the constant dread of vexing him.

It was not in him to feel the frantic jealousy which drives some men mad, but as he really loved her, he could not patiently, in spite of his wise resolutions, see her the object of another man's attention, especially when that man was Percy Vivian. He particularly hated him; why, he did not know; so the poor girl had a miserable time between the pair.

Love is said to be a "sunshine mixed with rain." The rain certainly predominated now in her experience. Horace was perpetually finding fault with her: he could hardly account to himself for the desire he felt to lecture her; and though she usually laughed at him, on some occasions she resented his conduct highly, and then underwent agonies of regret, thinking he was angry. She was not one of the young ladies who *are said* to enjoy being scolded and bullied by priggish lovers or husbands. She would draw up her graceful figure with stately dignity, and her sweet face would assume a look of calm, proud impassibility which tendered considerably to keep his lecturing propensities in check, though it could not eradicate them.

Some men can no more help lecturing the object of their affections than they can help breathing, especially before marriage. They seem to imagine that it gives them a certain right of possession—no man cares to lecture a woman he does not like—and very often the most troublesome lover turns out the quietest and most

amiable of husbands. Women, who are the people made love to, know this, hence the number of priggish, disagreeable lovers in the novels written by them. They do not evolve these prigs out of their own consciousness, but simply describe what they know to exist. That women like being bullied is another matter, and has not yet been proved, in spite of the critics. It is a proposition which any one who knows them well will deny most strenuously.

Horace's fits of temper alternated with sudden gleams of sunshine, when he was more tender and affectionate than ever, as if to compensate for his previous harshness.

Percy Vivian was the only gentleman who would not cede his place beside Blanche to him. He had once asked "if that fellow Radclyffe was engaged to Miss Seymour?" and receiving a negative reply, he henceforth lost no opportunity of disputing his claim to any exclusive right in her.

CHAPTER XXXV.

COLONEL RADCLYFFE had to go to London to arrange some money matters, and came back more eager than ever to secure Edythe Conway as his wife; but his first visit on his return to Ryde was to Blanche. It was second nature to him now to consult her about, and tell her everything.

She was sitting alone in her sister's drawing-room when he came in, and again he felt a sharp pang as he saw her face flush with delight and her dark eyes brighten into wonderful beauty the moment she became aware of his presence.

"Horace, how delightful that you are come! I was so afraid you wouldn't be back for the picnic."

"What picnic?" he asked, taking both her hands.

"Aunt Eleanor is going to give one, and we are to have a dance afterwards. I think it will be great fun, only I shouldn't have cared if you hadn't been back."

Horace felt as if he had been stabbed, but he only said tenderly—

"And what have you been doing with yourself, Blanche?"

"Not much. We went out in Sir George's yacht yesterday."

"Did Leila go too?"

"Yes; Leila and I, with Emily and

Geoffrey as chaperones. Edythe Conway was with us, also."

"And Vivian, of course?" said he, as if half ashamed of the question.

"Yes; he was there."

"He had you all to himself, then. Did he make himself as disagreeable as ever?"

He was tortured to know what she had been doing during his absence.

"No; he was rather tamer than usual, I think. I must tell you—it was such fun! the night before last we all dined at Uncle Rivers's, and when the ladies left the dining-room, Mr. Vivian said in a tone of great relief, 'Now we can be comfortable, and enjoy some rational conversation.' Of course the moment the gentlemen came up-stairs Charlie and Geoffrey told their respective wives, and you may imagine how Mabel chaffed him! He looked so taken aback and ashamed of himself."

"Served him right!" said Horace viciously.

"Mabel got up and offered him her chair, as she said it was the most comfortable in the room; Edythe brought him a footstool, but Emily was the most severe of all. She said quietly, but so that he could hear, 'It would be such an easy thing for Mr. Vivian to stay away from ladies' society if he dislikes them so much.' He looked so completely abashed, that I really felt almost sorry for him."

"What did you say to him?"

"I didn't say anything much. When Mabel offered him her chair, I told him I thought he would be more at his ease lying full length on the sofa, and as I was sitting on it, I got up and went away. He glared at me quite in your fashion,"—she glanced at him for one second,—"as if I had been the cause of the whole thing. When tea was brought in Aunt Eleanor said quite loud, 'Take it to Mr. Vivian first.' I think he'll be careful what he says before married men again."

"It wasn't very complimentary to you if he took you down to dinner," said Horace, delighted to give his rival a secret stab.

"He didn't. I went down with Geoffrey. But let me finish. When we all went on board the yacht yesterday he evidently hadn't expected such an importation. He was lying so comfortably in a hammock under the awning; I must say I should have been awfully disgusted myself at having to move such a hot day. I think he had gone there to escape the ladies, so you may imagine how savage he was, especially as we all entreated him

not to stir, and went and sat as far as possible away from him."

"What did Conway say?"

"He laughed, and asked him 'if he would like to go ashore?' but he declined, and I really think he tried to make amends by being a little more civil than usual."

"How so?"

"Oh, you could see in little things."

She did not tell him that Mr. Vivian seemed especially anxious to make amends to her personally, nor of one or two rather awkward attempts to offer her little attentions; attentions of the reception of which he was evidently doubtful, after the severe snubbing administered to him the preceding evening. Nor did she tell him that in his own absence she would hardly speak to the man she knew he disliked.

"He's an ill-conditioned fellow!" concluded Horace.

"Do you think so, really?"

"I do, Blanche, but I don't want to make you think so. He's an unexceptionable *parti*, you know. Lord Glennorth has no children, and you would be a peeress one day."

"But I don't want to be a peeress, Horace, if Mr. Vivian is to be the peer," she answered, laughing.

He looked gratified, in spite of himself. He frequently made these remarks, but she never saw their real drift, and simply took them as "chaff."

"How do Leila and Sir George get on?"

"Better, I fancy. He is in tremendous spirits, if that's a good sign."

Geoffrey Rivers had wondered to his wife if the Sea-Anemone would ever expand before her enamored Baronet. That gentleman had lately become very sanguine on the subject of this expansion, and personally Leila had no objection to him, but her dislike and dread of men in general were so great that she shrank with a sickening feeling of horror from putting herself in the power of any one man in particular. It was not in her nature to feel that strong, overpowering love which would cast such fears to the winds, nor was it possible that the gloomy impression which years of domestic tyranny to herself, and more especially to her mother, had left on her mind could be effaced by a few short weeks' relief from its grinding misery, though the atmosphere of love and kindness in which she now lived did something to lessen it.

She could not deny that Emily and Mabel seemed thoroughly happy, but she

qualified the admission by reflecting that they had been married a very short time. Still she had gone so far as to acknowledge to herself that if ever she did allow any man to be her husband Sir George Conway should have the preference.

He had been so concerned about her illness, and now he never forced himself or his attentions on her, though he let it be seen plainly that she was his first consideration. Then, after the stormy tempers she was used to, his sunny smile, his genial manner, and his easy, indulgent ways to all about him were doubly winning; so he was very sanguine, and told his sister that "Leila was growing tamer every day."

She liked yachting, to his inexpressible joy, and had let him show her all over the *Leila* without looking very much alarmed at being so long in his company. She asked him to sing, too, of her own accord, and played his accompaniments.

She was also ceasing, by degrees, to assume that cold, self-contained manner which used to come over her the moment she was in his company or that of his sister, and he, seeing her almost for the first time natural and cheerful, grew more anxious than ever to overcome her objections.

"He is more desperately in love than ever," said Edythe to Blanche one day, "and, really, if Leila persists in refusing him, I think it will turn his brain."

"I hope not, dear. Men are not so susceptible in these days."

"My dear Blanche, you have no idea how he goes on about her, and he is enraptured because she likes yachting. He says now, the best thing he ever did was starting the *Leila*, and he is making a plan for having the cabin altered, in case she comes here next year."

"He is coming to the picnic, I suppose?"

"Dear, yes! he's looking forward to it like a boy. He thinks Leila in a yachting-jacket is the most enchanting sight he ever witnessed, and wonders if she will wear one to-morrow."

Sir George's hopes were destined to be rudely dashed at this same picnic, however.

On the morning it was to take place Emily Rivers's baby was found to be restless and feverish. The nurse and grandmother assured her there was nothing to be uneasy about, but the young mother, unaccustomed to infantine ailments, was in an agony of anxiety, and declared decidedly at breakfast that she would not go.

At this announcement on the part of his small piece of property Geoffrey looked very crestfallen, but feeling that, as petticoats predominated at the table, numbers might be against him, like a prudent man—or a coward?—he reserved his forces for a private battle.

The enemy, unconscious of the meditated attack, withdrew to the nursery the moment she had finished a hasty breakfast, and as she did not seem disposed to come down from her entrenchments, he had no choice but to go up and offer battle where she was, surrounded still by a feminine cohort.

He began operations mildly enough. She was holding the baby on her lap—it was *not* her fancy that it ceased its moaning and was quieter as soon as she took it in her arms, though her nurse tried to persuade her it was;—Leila was kneeling beside her on one side—her sister on the other.

"How is he now, dear?" asked Geoffrey, looking down at it.

Though totally unconscious of it himself, he, like many another young father, was not quite free from a certain latent jealousy of this interloping baby that had come to interfere with his exclusive claims to the love and attention he considered his own. It was a boy, too—no man is jealous of his baby-daughter—but a male, though only six months old and his own child, gives rise to the passion somewhere deep down.

"About the same, I think. He is quieter now," replied Emily, in answer to her husband's question.

"But nurse doesn't think it is anything?"

"Oh, no, sir, nothing at all. I tell Mrs. Geoffrey she needn't be at all uneasy."

He stood looking at it silently for a minute or two, then,—“Are you soon coming down, Emily?”

"No, dear. I'm going to stay with baby." She answered without looking up.

"But you are not going to stay in the nursery all day?"

Something in his voice made her raise her eyes to his face.

"You will be out, Geof dear; you are going, are you not?"

"Yes; mother will be so vexed if I don't; and, Emily, I hope you will come too; as he is better, there can be no need for you to stay."

"Oh, Geoffrey, I should not like to leave him!" and an alarmed expression came into her lustrous eyes.

He plunged his hands deeper into his pockets.

"I can't see why, Emily. Nurse will take excellent care of him, and both she and my mother say you are frightening yourself needlessly."

Emily looked appealingly at the nurse, but that functionary, though an excellent creature, was human, and could not but wish, after the manner of nurses, that the mother would betake herself away, and leave her the management of the child.

In the eyes of all nurses a mother is an instrument used by Providence for the production of babies, but after that of no further use.

The merciful and righteous English law allows a wife few legal rights over the children whom, in pain and suffering, she has brought into the world, but even such jurisdiction as custom permits nurses would deny, had they their wills. The nursery is, they affirm, their *castle*, and ought not to be invaded by prying, over-anxious mothers; and, acting on this principle, Emily's deputy was not disposed to yield to that appealing glance. Failing help in that quarter, Emily said, "I'm not frightening myself, Geoffrey, but when my dear little baby is ill I like to stay with him," and her eyes went up appealingly to *him* this time. Geoffrey took one hand out of his pocket and began tugging at his moustache.

"Mary" (to his wife's sister), "don't you think it a pity Emily shouldn't come? of course, if the child was not better, I wouldn't say a word."

There is nothing more painful than to be appealed to by either party in a conjugal dispute, but it is simply detestable when the appeal comes from the husband, as every sentiment of generosity impels one to side with the wife, as the weaker vessel, no matter what one's private opinion may be.

Mary Peyton saw no necessity for her sister's staying at home, but she would no more have said so than she would have flown.

"Geoffrey dear, naturally you see poor Emily is very anxious——"

"Stop, Mary," said Emily, her mouth giving a slight quiver. "I'll come, Geoffrey, as you so much wish it. I did not know you would mind my staying away, as baby is ill, but I'll come, dear,"—by which it will be seen how far the idea of a battle was from her thoughts.

"You see, mother would be so disappointed if you didn't. She got up the whole thing for you and Mary and Archie,

and it would never do for the queen of the *fête* to be absent."

After a few minutes, having got what he wanted, he took his departure, and then Leila burst forth—"It's too bad of Geoffrey! it's quite shameful to torment you to go when dear baby is so ill!"

All motherly instincts were strong in her, and that nervous quiver of Emily's lip had gone straight to her heart. "I wouldn't go a bit," she went on excitedly. "Geoffrey is a downright brute!"

"*Ma chère, pas devant la bonne, je t'en prie,*" exclaimed Emily, resorting to a strange tongue in her extreme surprise, and then in English, "you are quite mistaken, Leila. Geoffrey doesn't want to force me to go, only, as he thinks baby is better, of course he likes to have me."

"And I think, dear Emily," said her sister hesitating, "don't you know"—in a low voice—"mamma said you ought to be careful not to put the baby before Geoffrey ever!"

"I don't—I try not," she said eagerly. "I should be a brute if I did. Dear Geoffrey!"

After a minute or two she rose. "Nurse, I'll give you baby now." She pressed her lips lovingly on its small, angel face, and left the room to seek her husband, feeling as if she had wronged him by hearing even a harsh word said of him. She went down-stairs calling him, and heard his responsive whistle from the drawing-room.

"Dear boy! what are you doing? don't you want me to write your letters for you?" She went up and stood behind him, putting her arms round his neck.

"I thought you were devoted to my rival, the baby, for the next two hours," he said half in jest, half in earnest.

She sat down on his knee. "Geoffrey, don't say that; I don't like it—it isn't right. No one and nothing can ever be your rival; you are in a place quite by yourself in my heart, and no one can ever come near you."

"Not that small bit of humanity upstairs?" he asked smiling.

"Not that, or any other, ever," she answered earnestly, clasping her arms closer round him.

Leila came into the room at that moment, but, seeing them thus sitting, withdrew hastily.

The whole incident was a trifle, but "trifles make the sum of human things," and this trifle impressed Leila greatly; did away with all the softening influences of her visit, and brought back the old bitter feeling that marriage was a tie

where all the duty and yielding were on one side, tyranny and exaction on the other.

Emily might sing Geoffrey's praises to her heart's content—might talk unceasingly to her of his kind thoughtfulness to herself, his delicate generosity to her family, his protecting care of Archie, interesting himself to get some articles he had written published, so that he might feel a little independent;—Emily might say all this, but there was the fact she had witnessed with her own eyes of his cruel selfishness in forcing her to leave her sick baby:—nothing could make her forget that; and not only this, but the miserable mother, her heart being with her child, had to go and propitiate her tyrant by caresses and loving words, no doubt to avoid further oppression.

"After all," she charitably concluded, "one man was as bad as another. If you thought one a degree better at first, you were sure to find out your mistake on further acquaintance," and with bitterness and disgust her thoughts went over all those whom she knew well. Her father—a tyrant whose language was made up of brutal oaths and imprecations; her brother—gentle in manner, certainly, but as hard as steel, she knew; and how was he treating the girl who loved and trusted him? Emily Rivers's father and eldest brother—idle, selfish spendthrifts; Ralph Seymour—he was a nice specimen! one who had ruined his widowed mother and orphan sisters, yet was always boasting of his superiority to them as a man, they being those inferior animals, women. Geoffrey Rivers she had thought an exception, but an intimate knowledge showed him to be as great a tyrant and as selfish as the rest; Archie Peyton did no harm, simply because he was lame and could not; Charles Maynard was, no doubt, horrid too, only she did not know it. Sir George Conway brought up the rear,—and alone as she was, Leila froze into an impassive statue as she reflected that it might ever be her fate to be in his power. Filled with these pleasing and cheerful sentiments, she started for her day's diversion.

Sir George had been up betimes and visited his yacht to order a copious repast to be provided for the following day, when his lady-love, as he was venturing to begin to think of her, had promised to honor him with her company on board.

On his return he eagerly inquired for a small deal box—a sort of miniature packing-case, expected from London, which box contained an exquisite bouquet

of delicate beauty and perfume, destined also for his ladye-love.

"Look, Edythe, do you think she will like it?" and then whistling for very lightness of heart, till his aunt's head ached woefully, he betook himself to his room to perform a most elaborate toilet, whence he emerged, joyful and happy, in the daintiest of velvet coats, carefully guarding his precious bouquet.

"It does one good to see him so happy, dear fellow!" said Edythe, as he stood at the window waiting for the carriage, alternately teasing her and his aunt and humming softly the songs he sang to Leila's accompaniments. He was gladly expectant—she had been so natural and gay latterly in his company. He was doomed to bitter disappointment. The most sensitive Sea-Anemone could not withdraw more completely into itself at the slightest touch than did Leila the moment her lover addressed her.

He had been watching her from a distance, bright and animated, talking to Mabel and Blanche, looking the impersonation of refined, high-bred grace and beauty, in her airy summer dress and the jacket—for she was a chilly mortal—he so much admired.

He came up with a bright smile, glad recognition in his sunny blue eyes, baring his golden head before her; but she received his genial greeting with icy, chilling coldness, though without any rudeness, replying to the remarks his hurt astonishment allowed him to make in the old, measured, constrained tones, and as soon as she could with politeness do so, she turned away to join another party.

His disappointment was so great that he could not quite conceal it, though he addressed some indifferent observation to Mabel.

"Edythe, what is it? what have I done?" he asked, when he could get near his sister, all the glad light gone out of his face. "She was as tame as could be yesterday, and now she will hardly speak to me."

Miss Conway could not account for it, and suggested that the change was merely accidental, and that she would be all right presently, so he went and sat down beside her, his unpresented posy still in his button-hole.

The conversation turned on a lady whose first husband drank terribly and had led her a dreadful life, but who married again in little more than a year after his death.

"Conceive," said Blanche, "any woman whom Providence mercifully relieved of

one such yoke, voluntarily running the risk a second time!"

"The perpetual triumph of hope over experience," replied Geoffrey.

"For my part," said Leila, "I can't understand how a woman, if she has been silly enough to marry, does not *always* rejoice at her husband's death."

She lowered her voice as she spoke, so that her words might not reach Mabel and Emily, as she had a vague kind of notion they might not quite agree with her.

Had a bath of ice-cold water been suddenly reversed over Sir George's head he could not have felt more utterly taken aback and confounded than he did at hearing this astonishing remark in his beloved's liquid tones. Was it possible that such could really be her opinion? and if so, was it expedient or wise to go on serving like Jacob for a Rachel who, when won, would look forward with joy to his demise?

He took off his hat and passed his hand rapidly through his hair, and then sat in perplexed silence till luncheon was over, helping Leila mechanically to all she wanted. In return for his attention she had to say something. "You don't eat anything yourself, Sir George."

"Thank you; I have had all I want." Then when a move was made, "Miss Radclyffe, may I beg the favor of a few minutes' conversation with you?"

Her heart gave a great leap.

"Certainly; is it anything particular?" she answered coldly.

"Come this way, please, Miss Radclyffe."

"Can't you say it here?" she asked, looking very much alarmed.

"I should prefer your coming on a little way," he said gently but firmly.

She hesitated. Compliance or refusal was equally disagreeable.

"I beg it as a special favor," he repeated.

She turned, but now that he had her alone he seemed at a loss what to say. At last, suddenly,—"*Miss Radclyffe*, you made a remark just before lunch which astonished me very much. Is it possible you think a wife ought to be glad when her husband dies?" and his blue eyes looked anxiously at her.

"I didn't say she *ought* to be, Sir George. I only said I could not understand how she was not."

He looked horrified. "Would you think me very impertinent if I asked why?" he said, after a pause.

She blushed, looking thereby very

charming. She was not a blushing beauty; she never hung out lovely signals of distress when Sir George or Sir Anybody approached her;—her blood had not the trick of ebbing and flowing with every changing feeling, but now she blushed a deep carmine, and the young man felt the spirit of servitude come strongly over him again.

She looked out straight before her. "Because, I think, she then escapes from a tyrant."

"Do you think every man is a tyrant?"

"No; not every man, only every husband?"

"Then do you think no marriages are happy?"

"There may be a few. I only speak from my own observation."

A long pause. Sir George was deeply puzzled. Like all his sex, he was imbued with the idea that marriage was the chief object and aim of a woman's life, that every girl was ready to jump down any man's throat, and though Leila was certainly backward in jumping down his, still he had only half believed her brother's explanation of her refusal. Her brother only half believed it himself.

Men are firmly convinced that it is the easiest thing in the world to get a wife till experience convinces some of them that facts do not tally with their belief.

"Do you think your cousin, Mrs. Maynard, is unhappy in her marriage, or young Mrs. Rivers?" He spoke hesitatingly, as if doubtful of the propriety of going so near home.

"They have been married a very short time," she answered decisively but evasively. Another long pause.

"I think we might turn back now," said Leila.

"Not yet," he pleaded. "Miss Radclyffe, I am deeply grieved that you hold such an unfavorable view of married life. I don't deny that there are many unhappy marriages, but your own experience must tell you there are many happy ones."

"It doesn't," she said, decidedly; "quite the contrary."

He felt floored, but returned gallantly to the charge, only changing his tactics.

"I have been very sanguine lately, Miss Radclyffe, thinking you would be induced to hold out some hope of a change in your sentiments regarding me."

He looked at her with anxiously questioning eyes. He had come prepared to pour forth his long pent-up love eagerly, passionately; to plead his own cause warmly, perseveringly, if need were; but

this cold, collected manner of Leila's kept him outwardly calm, at least, in spite of himself.

"Can't you give me any hope?" And he bent a little over her, as she walked beside him. "You must see how devotedly I love you, Leila; it is no exaggeration to say I think of you morning, noon, and night."

She felt a curious sensation at hearing him call her by her Christian name. She turned very white, not her usual creamy paleness, as beautiful in its way as Blanche's ever-changing carmine, but a deadly pallor, painful to see.

"Sir George," she answered in a very low voice, "if you would listen to me, I would try to explain how impossible it is that I can ever fill the position you wish."

"I will listen," he said eagerly. "Why can't you?"

"You have been so kind to me always—so—so forbearing, I suppose I must say——"

"Forbearing? how?"

"I mean you haven't spoken to mamma about me, and all that——"

"God forbid?" he said earnestly. "I want your consent, your love, Leila, given freely."

"I know," she went on simply; "but that you cannot have."

She turned away her eyes to avoid the pained look in his.

"I respect you so much, that I will tell you the reason, and I'm sure then that you will be kind enough never to ask me again."

"What is your reason?"

"Simply that I never wish to marry."

"But," he began eagerly.

"Let me finish, Sir George. I have seen so much misery in married life—so much that I think dreadful," and a shiver passed over her—"that I will never, with my own consent, be any man's wife, and this is my reason for refusing the love you offer me."

"My God! I don't offer it! I feel it! I can no more help loving you than I can help breathing," he exclaimed passionately.

She shrank from him with a frightened look.

"There are numbers of girls who will be happy and willing to fill the position. Seek a bride among them."

"I want no bride but you," he said, turning away with passionate despair. "You speak of 'filling a position,'" he went on, looking at her again with eager vehemence in his voice; "I don't want a

housekeeper, one woman is *not* the same to me as another: I should love you as I do now were I a beggar and you a duchess; I want you to be my wife because I love you. You can't know what love means, or you would not talk about 'filling a position.' "

"I don't suppose I do," she said quietly, "but I know that it often leads to great unhappiness."

"Do you think I should bully you if you were my wife?" he asked, fixing his blue eyes—no longer bonny—on her face.

"Very likely not; but you would have it in your power to do so, and I will never subject myself to such a possibility."

"A man who bullies his wife is a scoundrel."

"Then there are a good many—scoundrels in the world," she said, pausing before the obnoxious noun, her high-bred face, meanwhile, assuming a look of cold, determined aversion as she thought of Emily's quivering lip that morning, and Geoffrey, his hands in his pockets, standing looking at her and her baby.

They went on in silence for some way; then he broke out suddenly, as if the words were forced from him,—

"But if every one thought like you the world would come to an end."

To this philosophical remark she made no answer.

"A woman is much happier when she is married. She has her house and her children and a clearly-defined position."

Still Leila made no answer.

"You don't agree with me?" he asked, as if she had not denied his proposition from the first.

"No, I don't. I've seen too much."

"You think having to accept such an appendage as a husband, even though he may love you dearly, more than counterbalances the good," he said bitterly.

"Plainly, then, I do."

She had been looking straight out before her, but as she made this unflattering admission she turned her eyes to his countenance, and saw there wounded and mortified affection, mingled with an expression, half astonishment, half disgust.

"You deny that there can be any happiness in an arrangement of God's own making?"

"No, I don't. I think there may be great positive happiness for a time, but an unmarried woman enjoys more negative happiness in the end."

They walked on and on in silence. His pride, all his feelings as a man were deeply hurt, but his love was so overpowering,

combined with a masculine wish to overcome her repugnance, and he entertained, besides, such a conviction of the unnaturalness of her sentiments and of his own ability to give her brighter ideas of life (what man ever doubted that?), that he could not abandon the contest.

Leila only felt the cold, bitter sense of wrong and injury the subject never failed to rouse in her mind.

They came to a clump of trees waving in the soft September air. A lark was singing high up a song of love and joy—a murmuring brook went rippling on, and from a neighboring wood came the sound of the reapers' voices.

Sir George stopped suddenly under the shading trees, took off his hat, and passed his hand through his hair, an action which characterized him when in perplexity or excitement, and putting it on again, seized Leila's hand in both his, stooped and pressed his moustached lips on it.

"Leila, will you let me convince you that there can be happiness in married life? Is it possible the immense love I feel for you can awake no response in your heart? Leila, I have loved you so long; ever since you were a little child. I have always thought you the most beautiful, the most graceful thing God ever made. And, Leila, I've tried to keep straight for your sake always—I have, upon my soul! can't you trust me? I've kept straight on the mere hope of having you one day. Surely you could trust me when I should have your sweet presence always with me!"

He looked at her with his eager, burning blue eyes, and again covered her hand with kisses.

Leila was quite unprepared for this vehement style of wooing. She particularly disliked having her hand kissed, and felt alarmed and annoyed. She looked round to see if any one was near; but, no,—they were alone. Only the distant voices came softened across the fields—the lark sang on his song of jubilee in the blue sky, and the brook ran rippling on in the sunlight.

She tried to withdraw her hand, gently, so as to give him as little pain as possible, but he would not let it go.

"No, Leila, answer me. Give me some hope, no matter how distant. Say that this time ten years you will be my wife, and I will wait."

"I have said all I can say already," she answered in a low, steady voice, looking and feeling very much frightened.

He saw her fears, and even in his madness knew that he should gain nothing by increasing them.

"Forgive me," he said, releasing her hand; "I did not mean to distress you; but, Leila, you can't know what it is to me to lose all hope of winning you. I have lived on hope for years; I tell you, you are the one woman in the world for me. Your life has been unhappy hitherto, perhaps. Come to me, and I'll do all a man can to brighten it."

"You are mistaken," she said nervously. "My life has not been unhappy. If you love me as you say you would be content with my answer."

"That's impossible!" he exclaimed vehemently.

"Sir George, I can give you no other."

"That you will never be my wife?"

"I shall never be any one's wife. Pray let us go back to the others."

He did not heed her request, but turned away and walked over to the brook, among the trees.

She looked at him for a moment, and then set off, rapidly, pantingly, in the direction whence she thought they had come. She was not sure of the way, for in her nervousness she had not noticed how they came, but she would go to the reapers,—anywhere, so as not to be left alone again with her vehement and resolute lover. She went on swiftly, with panting breath, still feeling his burning kisses on her hand, still seeing the bright, blue eyes bent on her, and the curling golden hair.

She had got on some way when she heard a rapid tread behind her, and turning, to her alarm, saw him. He strode up quickly to her side.

"Miss Radclyffe, I owe you many apologies for having left you so abruptly," he spoke gravely and sadly, though there was no anger in the tone, "but I think you would pardon me if you knew the blow your refusal has been to me. I won't press you any more, however. You are going the wrong way—I don't know if you are aware."

"I didn't notice how we came," she said, scarcely able to speak from nervous trepidation.

They walked on some way in complete silence, then he spoke. "Miss Radclyffe, —or may I call you Leila this once?—I apologize most deeply if I have distressed you. Will you forgive me?" and he held out his hand, into which she very timidly placed her small one. He crushed all her rings into her fingers, after which feat he

released it at once. "I came here to-day very full of hope," he went on sadly, with a wistful gaze in his eyes, very touching to behold; "your kindness lately had encouraged me;—I see I was mistaken."

"I did not mean to encourage you," she said exculpatingly. "I hope I have not behaved badly,—I mean as if I intended to trifle with you. Indeed, I had no such intention. It is so hard to know what to do without being rude. I respect your feelings, though I cannot respond to them, and I am so sensible of your kindness."

She blushed her rare blush again.

"You have never trifled with me," he said kindly, "or behaved otherwise than like—yourself."

He took the flowers he had brought for her out of his button-hole. "I brought this, hoping to give it to you under happier circumstances for myself. Will you accept it still? And if at any time in your life you should want a friend, will you let me be one to you, though you won't accept me as your—natural protector?"

She hesitated, still blushing.

"I shall not consider your taking it any *encouragement*," he said, smiling a sad smile.

She took it and held it in her hand, much as she would have held a hot cinder, and then they walked on in silence till they joined some of the party, Leila feeling more selfish and thoroughly ashamed of herself than she had ever done in her life before.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

COLONEL RADCLYFFE, as well as Sir George Conway, had adorned his handsome person with great care for this picnic. He also appeared in an unexceptionable velvet coat, and provided himself with flowers,—one small posy fastened in his coat, and one which he carried in his hand. This last affection and habit, alike, destined for Blanche Seymour. The first, policy designed for Miss Conway when some fitting opportunity for presenting it should occur: for on this auspicious day he proposed commencing his attack on that young lady's heart, or rather her purse.

Mrs. Seymour was too much of an in-

valid for picnics, so Mabel had offered Horace a place in her carriage.

"Good-morning, Horace," said Blanche, a little shyly, but her face beaming a rapturous welcome as he came up to take his place. "What an extravagant fellow you are! I had got you a modest flower for your coat, but I see you have a gorgeous bouquet."

He bent gayly towards her and gave her the one in his hand.

"Exchange is no robbery, Blanche," and he attempted to take hers.

"No, no, Horace; you have a much better one in your coat already: mine looks like a poor Cinderella beside it."

"Cinderella was more valued than all her fine sisters, wasn't she?" he said still gayly, and taking it with gentle force from her. "Give it me, Blanche. I shall always keep it for your sake," and for one moment a look she did not understand came over his face.

Many other things happened that day which she did not understand either.

He was as gay and gentle as ever, and full of affectionate devotion to her during the drive, teasing and chaffing her, as was his wont, and she was supremely happy; but at lunch, she hardly knew why, she missed something.

He was perfectly attentive to her, seeing to her every want, still her instinct told her there was a change. He had contrived to get Edythe Conway on his other side, and a sharp pang shot through Blanche's heart as she saw him bend over her and speak in that soft, tender voice which had hitherto been her own exclusive property.

When they stood up, he waited a moment or two till he saw her speaking to Geoffrey, and then, rapidly turning to Edythe, strolled away with her under the trees.

Blanche was not aware that that sharp pain at her heart was jealousy. She had never felt anything like it before. Whatever it was, she was ashamed of it, and tried to crush it down. Was she to grudge his speaking to another girl? And she went on talking lightly and apparently unconcernedly to Geoffrey and Mr. Maynard—apparently, though her eyes followed every movement of that pair among the trees, as Horace bent his noble-looking head to catch Edythe's words. For a time she watched them, and then, blushing at herself, turned resolutely away.

As the day went on and he never came near her, never came to whisper some senseless nothing, to bend gayly over her

with "chaffing" remarks about the sayings and doings round them, a sense of painful loneliness and wonder came over her which she could not shake off. Was he angry with her? His temper lately had become very changeable, and she recalled every word she had said and everything she had done, but in no way could she see how she had vexed him. There was no Mr. Vivian to arouse his jealousy.

It was a glorious September day, filled with all the grand harmonies with which God has enriched the earth, but to her it was gloomier than any murky, London November sky—its harmonies utterly discordant—its brightness mocking her longing heart.

She was thankful when the carriage came to take them home. Surely he would come to put her in. He did.

"Blanche, I've hardly seen you all day. How have you been getting on?"

Her heart gave a joyful bound. "Horace, I couldn't think what had happened to you!" and her eyes, dark and beautiful, went up with reproachful tenderness to his face. "I thought I must have offended you mortally."

"You could hardly do that, Blanche," he said in his soft voice, feeling a sharp twinge of remorse. "I had to be civil to Conway's sister."

She felt no suspicion, and was innocently happy again in his company.

"Have you room for me?" he asked.

Yes, there was room; and they drove home, Blanche vaguely wondering why she had felt so wretched all day.

The whole party was to assemble at Mrs. Rivers's for dinner. Emily flew up to her baby, to overwhelm the nurse with eager inquiries, and its small self with soft, tender kisses. "My darling baby, I thought the day would never be over!"

Mrs. Rivers asked Blanche to take Miss Conway up-stairs to dress.

At the sight of her Blanche felt that same pain at her heart that had come at lunch-time to darken her day, but she again crushed it down, as utterly unworthy.

"Come on, Edythe dear," she said, kissing her with a heroic effort; "we'll go to Emily's room."

Edythe had not yet heard of her brother's discomfiture. He would not spoil her day.

"Blanche," said she in her usual blunt way, "I like your cousin, Colonel Radclyffe, immensely. I never did before. I always used to be a little afraid of him."

"Afraid? why?" asked Blanche, feel-

lad, she scarcely knew why, that it was so dark to let her face be seen.

"I hardly know. He is so dark and commanding-looking. He reminds me of a centurion who said 'Go,' and the man went. I feel as if I should have to go and come just as he said."

"He isn't like that in the least," said Blanche; "certainly not to ladies."

"How fond he is of you!" said Edythe, after a pause; "he talked of you nearly all the time. He says he thinks you are the cleverest and most beautiful girl he ever knew."

Blanche's heart leaped up. Why had she made herself miserable all day? No thought of marrying entered her head. Her ideas about her relations with Horace had never assumed any definite form, further than that his affection and approbation were necessary to her existence. Assured of them, she needed nothing else.

She felt a rapture of joy as Edythe spoke, but she only said, "I am glad you like him. He and I have been great allies for a long time."

"No one but George is as fond of me as he is of you," said Edythe, half sadly. By which it will be seen that Colonel Radclyffe had taken care to represent his liking for his cousin as of a very fraternal character.

They went down to the drawing-room, where a message awaited them to the effect that Sir George was not coming to dinner. He was obliged to go to town quite suddenly.

"It's very odd," said Edythe.

Horace took her into dinner, and she soon learned from him what had occurred.

Blanche saw them engaged in confidential conversation, but strong in the assurance of Horace's preference, she tried to feel no uneasiness.

Sir George had told Horace of Leila's refusal. That gallant gentleman was much chagrined at the communication, as it complicated matters, he feared, for himself.

Sir George left many messages begging they would make what use they pleased of his yacht the next day; he was sorry, etc., he could not be there. Of course no one did make use of it, and of course, though he desired it might be a secret, every one knew that night that Leila Radclyffe had refused him. Those things always are known, though no one ever tells them.

But Leila did tell Blanche the next day, dwelling much on the miseries of young

women, who could not even go to an innocent picnic without being subject to proposals from madly enamored young men.

"Leila," said Blanche, highly provoked, "I'm sure you were beginning to like him. I'm sure you do like him. What induced you to blight his life, and send him off like that?"

"Blight his life! Stuff!" exclaimed Leila, with some asperity. Her conscience troubled her, therefore she had to be angry with some one. "There are hundreds of girls who would willingly have him. Let him take one of them. I never will make myself any man's slave."

"I think he is your slave, Leila, and you are very wrong to treat him as you do. You *know* you would be happier with him than you are now. Look how happy Emily is."

"Yes," said Leila bitterly, her face assuming its old hard expression, "I have seen some specimens of Emily's happiness. How happy she was yesterday, forced to leave her poor little sick baby to a hireling, while she danced attendance on her lord and master, just to gratify his caprice, for he didn't want her."

"I believe Geoffrey's having persuaded Emily to go with him made you refuse Sir George," said Blanche in fun, never dreaming it was so.

"If I had ever for a moment been foolish enough to think of yielding, what I saw yesterday was an effectual warning to me."

Geoffrey's astonishment, when this fact was communicated to him by Blanche, half in amusement, half in annoyance, may be more easily imagined than described.

"What the — does she mean?" he exclaimed, quite frightened out of all clerical propriety at being accused of bullying his "little one."

No man ever thinks he is unkind or exacting himself, and if the knowledge that he has been so is forced on him, his surprise knows no bounds. What had he done that he should be taken as a warning against matrimony by all eligible maidens?

"Does she take me for an unmitigated brute, then?" he asked, tugging at his moustache.

"I conclude so," said Blanche.

"The — she does! And does Emily too?" And without waiting for an answer, he rushed off in search of his helpmate.

“Emily, what’s all this? Here is Leila Radclyffe frightened out of marrying Conway by my brutality to you! With such an example before her, she asks how is she to consent to be any man’s wife? What the deuce did I do? I didn’t force you to come yesterday, did I? I thought the child was better, and that it would be very dull for you all alone, and I like to have you with me. I didn’t know you wanted to stay at home so much.” He spoke in great excitement, ending in a slightly bitter tone.

“Dear Geoffrey, what *do* you mean? of course I liked to go with you! Who said I didn’t?”

“Leila. She draws a miserable picture of you forced away from your suffering child by your domestic tyrant, who, like all other men, is, she says, an unmitigated brute. Why did you come if you hated it so?”

“Geoffrey,” said Emily gravely, “I think you are very foolish to mind what Leila says, or any one else either. She knows nothing at all about it,” she went on with the oracular wisdom of her two years of wifehood. Every woman, after a week’s marriage, is convinced she knows more of life and its experiences than the most venerable spinster under the sun.

“It is true, I was unhappy about my little baby,” went on Emily, “but she doesn’t understand that I should have been quite as unhappy if I had stayed at home, thinking that I was not with you. Don’t pull your moustache out about it—there’s a dear boy!”

“But I should have stayed at home with you if you had said so,” and he kissed her, stroking her hair.

He wouldn’t, and she knew it, but he *thought* he would now, so she did not gainsay him.

When a man has got his own way he is the most amiable of mortals, and swears he didn’t care about it—it was all for your sake.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

“BLANCHE, will you come with me for a walk?” asked Colonel Radclyffe, going into the garden to his cousin, who was sitting there making believe to read. The book lay in her lap, but Blanche’s thoughts were not in it, any more than

Xarifa’s fingers wove those flowers when they held the silk: her thoughts were going over yesterday’s incidents, some of which were to her like a frightful dream “from which one awaketh.”

“If I had to go on long suffering what I did those few hours,” was her conclusion, “I should die! I could not live under such torturing agony.”

The young call Death eagerly to their assistance in every trouble. They have yet to learn that that Great Reliever will not come at their call, but waits, with cruel forbearance, till Time has made them callous to suffering, and taught them to hug the chains of mortality.

To-day Blanche was happy and herself again, and responded to Horace’s question by that bright beautiful blush which he never saw now without a feeling of compunction.

“Yes; I should like it. Where shall we go?”

He looked at her deliberately from her hatless head with its coronal of brown hair, to her small feet, with admiring affection, and again with that expression she did not understand.

“Why do you look at me so, Horace?” she inquired.

“Why does one look at anything that is bright and beautiful?” he said earnestly. “Your dress is always so perfect, too, Blanche. Get your hat, and we will go down to the Pier. I want to talk to you, and there won’t be any one there now.”

A plan had obtained no consistency in his mind till he had taken her opinion on it: he wanted to consult her about Edythe, and if he got her consent and approval it might put a stop to those constant twinges of conscience he felt every time he thought of her. He was very cool and determined about anything he took in hand, but he *did* feel a certain trepidation about making this communication.

The Pier was nearly empty, and they sat down in a sheltered part looking away to sea—such sea as there is at Ryde.

“Blanche, I’ve been waiting to consult you for some days. The fact is, I’m deucedly in Queer Street again, and must be thinking of how I can set myself straight.”

“Horace, why do you get so in debt when you know your father won’t help you?” asked Blanche, with a woman’s merciless straightforwardness on the subject of expenditure.

“My dear Blanche, it is no use talking

like that. I'm put into an expensive regiment, and must live like the other fellows in it."

"I don't see why you must, if you can't afford it."

"Blanche, that is not speaking with your usual good sense. I can't make myself ridiculous. Besides," he added, regardless of logic, "I don't spend a penny more than I can help. No, Blanche, there is but one chance for me! You see, it was an awful facer about poor Alice, but it's no use crying over spilt milk, is it? it won't bring her back; and as, I suppose, I must marry some day, don't you think I might as well do it now as at any other time?"

Blanche Seymour was assuredly a great fool, for she never saw his drift.

"I don't see how that can help you, unless you marry an heiress, and—don't be angry with me, Horace—but it always seems to me such a horrid idea paying your debts with your wife's money."

"So it is; I quite agree with you; but what is a fellow to do? I wouldn't marry for money if I could help it."

"But, Horace, surely you wouldn't marry only for money?" and her voice told him she was beginning to apprehend his meaning.

"I've no help for it, Blanche. It's my only chance." He spoke apologetically.

Earth, sea, and sky, mingled together, went round in a wild whirl before the girl's eyes. Her heart stood quite still—but she commanded her voice with indomitable resolution while she asked, "And whom are you thinking of marrying?"

"Well, I was thinking of Conway's sister, if it is your opinion that I should have any chance." He spoke in a low voice, and had the grace not to look at his victim while he gave this last stab. He had calculated on her courage. She was courageous, and unconquerably proud, as only a woman can be, but the blow was sharp and sudden—so sudden that it threw her off her guard for the moment. No word passed her lips, but all her self-command could not conceal the agonized expression that crossed her face—the look of a helpless, hunted animal that came into her lovely, fearless eyes. Her silence as she endeavored to master herself, made him look at her, but one glance was enough, and he turned away hastily. He did not relent for one moment, but he would be glad when the ordeal was over, and he never should forget that look.

Both sat mute for some minutes,

"And the stately ships went on
To their haven under the hill,"

and the many-colored sea danced and sparkled in the sunlight, and shimmered and darkened alternately as it reflected every passing cloud.

The suffering of a lifetime seemed to her crowded into those few minutes: then she spoke calmly, "Horace, I think if you can win Edythe's love she will make you very happy. She dreads being liked only for her money, so you must try to love her for herself."

"Do you think I have any chance?" he asked eagerly, his sorrow for the stricken girl beside him completely swallowed up in his anxiety about himself.

"She told me yesterday, after you had been talking to her, that she liked you very much. You must reassure her, for she is rather afraid of you."

"Afraid? why?"

She smiled,—a smile that had lost all its brightness. "She thinks you look formidable, I suppose."

"You see, Blanche," he continued in an exculpatory voice, "it is the only thing I can do. I shall make her a good husband, I think. You know well, Blanche, if I was Charlie instead of the miserable devil I am, I needn't think of money, and could marry the girl of my choice, don't you?" and he looked at her, as if begging for an affirmative answer.

"Yes; I know. I'm very sorry—so sorry for you, Horace, and I most sincerely hope, if you marry Edythe, you will be very happy, both of you." She struggled bravely to keep her lips from quivering.

"Blanche, you are my best friend and adviser. I couldn't do anything without consulting you. Marrying on nothing, where people have been brought up to certain luxuries which have become necessities, is always wretched work, isn't it?"

She assented, and then he entered into a detailed statement of his financial difficulties, dwelling much on the failure of all his resources, as if to excuse himself both in her eyes and his own.

"And Blanche, whether I marry or not, you and I will always be good friends, sha'n't we?"

"Certainly, dear Horace. I wish you all success," and she held out her hand.

Suddenly her future life, like a dreary waste, when she should no longer be first with him, no longer share his hopes and fears, passed as a hideous vision before her mind's eye, and all her efforts were not equal to preventing two or three large

tears gathering in her eyes. Her head was turned away, and she hoped he did not see them;—but he did, though he was not looking, and was divided between concern at witnessing the distress he could not console, and satisfaction that she fully understood him.

She wiped her tears away furtively, and they sat for nearly half an hour in complete silence; and then, as people came crowding on the Pier, they went home, talking the while over his plans and of Mabel's new home to which she was soon going.

The light of Blanche Seymour's life was quenched, but her chief sensation was one of overwhelming, burning shame at having made such a display of feeling before Horace. She was not in the least aware how completely her face had been an open book to him during the last year.

"What must he think of me? how could I do anything so dreadful? To let him see I cared for him when he had never said a word to me!"

But even while she blamed herself thus, her common sense and her heart alike told her that though he had never said, "Blanche, I love you," his looks and actions had declared it often enough. And then she set herself to make excuses for him. It was base to betray the girl he loved for money, but what could he do? "Surely the law of England was unjust, which gave all to one son and left the others beggars."

She sat through lunch talking as if nothing had happened, while her heart was aching so horribly, and then, overcome by the craving desire for undisturbed solitude, she hastily left the house and started off towards Sea-View.

She walked rapidly, as if motion would still that aching pain, and sitting down at last behind a rock on the sand, wrestled alone with her great agony and her immense sense of humiliation. "Yet, after all, I couldn't help loving him, and he did do everything he could to make me like him, and I thought he loved me!"

She supposed he did not now; could she have felt certain of his love she would, she imagined, be relieved of half her misery. But she would always and ever love him, and be his friend, as he had asked her; and then she sat for hours—sat till the sun was painting the sea with gorgeous evening colors, heedless of the passers-by, her mind going idly over ever the same words—

"Oh, well for the fisherman's boy
That he shouts with his sister at play!

Oh, well for the sailor lad
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

Never. She felt that, as she listlessly watched the advancing tide.

As she was thus sitting she heard a step,—a step she knew too well,—she should know it among ten thousand! She sat immovable, hoping he would pass her unheeding, but he saw her, gave a violent start, and stopped abruptly, flinging away his cigar.

"Blanche, my child, what brings you here so late?"

He spoke with concentrated tenderness. Having relieved his conscience, as he thought, he might now give expression to all the love and pity he felt. The flush which always dyed her face with beauty when he came prevented his seeing the change those few hours' suffering had wrought.

"I came for a walk, and forgot that it was so late. Isn't it a superb evening?" she replied calmly.

"You ought not to have come alone. Where have you been?" and he looked at the stained and limp white dress he had seen so fresh and delicate in the morning.

"Only about on the sand and sitting here. I must go home now," and she rose, slightly shuddering.

"Are you cold?"

"No; only I've been sitting a long time and am stiff," and she smiled. "Where are you going?"

"Back with you now. I walked along here smoking, as I had nothing particular to do. I went to Maynard's about five, but couldn't find you. I certainly never thought I should pick you up out here."

And they walked home together by the sounding sea, as the sun went down, flaming red and orange and golden pink, glorious into his watery bed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

EMILY RIVERS had given expression to those words of warning to Colonel Radclyffe on the subject of Blanche of which she had spoken to her husband. She did it in fear and trembling, but he took it in tolerably good part on the whole.

"I think you are quite right to speak,

Emily, but Blanche and I thoroughly understand each other. She knows I should not be selfish enough to say to her, 'Come, and share nothing with me.' "

"Exactly so; but then, Horace, you ought not to be—to be about always with her, and all that. You ought to go away at once, and keep out of her way."

"Why so?"

"Because you ought."

"We can be, and are, very good friends as we are, if people would only not interfere."

"I'm sorry to seem to interfere," she said, blushing, "but all the happiness of my life I owe to Blanche, and I can't see her—see her—her happiness risked," she ended, floundering about for the least offensive expression.

"You honor me highly, Emily, by attributing any feeling toward me on her part," he answered, ashamed of himself as he spoke, "but you are mistaken. We like and value each other as friends, and we both know that in our position anything further is out of the question, though that is no reason why I should never see or speak to her."

"You don't consider the injury to her."

"What injury? I always tell her I withdraw in favor of any eligible aspirant."

"Horace, that's basely selfish, I tell you!" she exclaimed, her fear of him overpowered by anger at his cool disregard of Blanche's feelings. "What do you suppose she is made of, to be taken up and thrown down at your pleasure? Do you think she has no heart? Such friendships as you speak of are impossible between a young man and a girl like her. What should you say of her if she amused herself so with you? Go away at once, before you do irreparable mischief."

"I need not go," he said, smothering his anger; "the Maynards leave on Saturday, and Blanche and Mrs. Seymour go with them, so she will be delivered from such a wolf in sheep's clothing as I am. I suppose I can't do much harm between this and Saturday."

"I don't mean only now, but always," persisted Emily, accenting the last word.

Horace felt secretly fiercely wroth, but he would not show it, first, because he was speaking to a lady, secondly, because being a curious mixture of good and evil, conscience urgently insisted that the unpalatable advice he had received was right. His conscience was a perpetual bore to him now, though on this occasion

he managed to stifle it, and bought a beautiful present for Blanche, as if that could make up for her wrecked happiness.

Mrs. Seymour and her daughter accompanied Mabel to take possession of her new home. Blanche tried to feel all befitting joy on the occasion, and she was sincerely thankful for her sister's happiness, but the contrast between it and her own misery was almost more than she could bear. Why, she thought sadly, should one be so blessed and the other condemned to loneliness and despair?

She had not told Mabel of that conversation with Horace. Her affection for her was unchanged, but it was not quite the same to confide in her now when all she said might, in a moment of unbounded confidence, be repeated to Charlie. Dear Charlie! she loved him, and, of course, he was the best man in the world, still, somehow, she would rather not quite lay bare her heart to him. It was not, therefore, just as when she and Mabel were "we alone and no other." Mabel vowed she never told Charlie anything her sister objected to his knowing. "I don't tell, and of course he never asks," still Blanche kept that day's events to herself, and acted so well that Mabel and her mother guessed but little of the truth, though the quick eyes of affection saw that all was not quite right.

And then Mrs. Seymour and Blanche went back to London, and were devoted to each other, the latter only living to make her mother happy; and Horace came backwards and forwards often,—too often,—and she enjoyed a feverish, fitful, restless happiness in his presence, alternating with paroxysms of agony, existing on the letters he, with selfish, cruel kindness, continued to write three or four times a week, sometimes every day, and so the autumn went and winter came.

There was no Ice King this year. The winter was green, and would fatten the churchyards in the early spring; but it was welcomed by the old people and the hunting men, alike in this, that they hail with joy the mild, wet, muggy, dismal days, provocative of suicide to all other classes, in preference to the brisk, clear, frosty weather which makes the blood dance and circulate in the veins with a feeling of perpetual youth.

It was a splendid hunting season. The old master of the Leighton hounds was lately dead, and by all but unanimous consent Sir George Conway had been elected to the vacant post;—all but unan-

imus, for there was one dissentient voice,—Mr. Radclyffe's. He protested in vehement language against prostituting a grand old English institution like hunting, by appointing a "counter-jumping upstart like Conway" to the mastership.

He swore at first he would never hunt with the pack again, but, on reflection, concluded that, perhaps, such a decision on his part would be a joyful relief to all concerned, so he ended by determining to hunt and make himself as disagreeable as possible. "I'll work him, — him," was his amiable resolution. And he did, if by that he meant making himself thoroughly odious, more so even than was his normal condition.

Had he been a younger man his conduct would not have been tolerated for a moment, but old men presume on their age as women sometimes do on their weakness. Sir George acted with marvelous temper and patience, marvelous even in him, genial and forbearing as he was.

It was near Christmas, and there had been a famous run. Mr. Radclyffe had made himself more than usually conspicuous by the profanity and frequency of his oaths, and the extreme insolence of his demeanor to Sir George.

That young man, after his exertions, was riding slowly home through the shortening December day. As he drew near his own park-gates he saw a red and white heap lying on the road, inert, shapeless.

"Good God! who's that?" he exclaimed, and dismounted in a moment. Twisting his bridle round his arm, he bent over the fallen man to turn up the white, insensible face. It was Mr. Radclyffe. The Baronet's thoughts flew to Leila. "Great heavens, he's dead!" To ride to his own lodge and procure assistance was the work of a few minutes, and Mr. Radclyffe was carried up the Leighton Avenue, and through the stately portals under which, consciously, he would never have gone, and which he never passed without execrating the counter-jumping, money-grubbing owner thereof, Sir George's mission, however, happily for himself, not being to grub, but to dissipate what others had grubbed for his benefit.

The doctor pronounced Mr. Radclyffe alive, but all efforts to restore consciousness proved vain, and the young man, leaving him in the hands of the medical attendant, started at once, without eating or dressing, for the ten-mile drive to Deerscourt to break the news to Mrs. Radclyffe.

She and her daughter were enjoying the luxury of five o'clock tea in peace, when the library door opened and a red figure entered. Both started into an attitude of "attention." Mr. Radclyffe's family always did so at his approach—but the figure was not bulky enough nor the tread heavy enough for him, and the courteous greeting was very different to his usual affable style of address.

"I come in unannounced, Mrs. Radclyffe," a very low bow to the young lady, his fair face flushing deeply, "not to startle you," and then, as gently as he could, he broke the news.

She was calm, as fussy women always are on important occasions. "Is he dead?" she asked.

"No; but insensible, and he had not recovered when I left home."

"I can never thank you enough for coming. Will you allow me to drive you back?" The carriage had been instantly ordered.

"Thank you; my horse is very much beat. I should be much obliged."

"Leila, write a message to be telegraphed to Horace," said Mrs. Radclyffe.

That gallant warrior was in London. He declared he "simply could not stand his father's behavior in the hunting-field," so avoided the pursuit of the wily animal more and more, unless he could enjoy the exhilarating amusement apart from his progenitor, and spent much of his time "philandering" after Blanche.

Leila had only seen Sir George once since that memorable day at Ryde: then he had passed her riding as she was driving, and had bared his head and bowed nearly to his saddle; but she heard enough of him.

All the other grievances of Mr. Radclyffe's life were a drop in the ocean compared to this elevation of Sir George Conway to the mastership of the Leighton hounds. Night after night did he inveigh against counter-jumpers in general and Sir George in particular; night after night his children listened to him (unless Horace had escaped to town), intense loathing alternating in their minds with utter weariness, and Mrs. Radclyffe found comfort in the thought that assuredly had Leila wed the lord of Leighton Court her own life would have been even more miserable than it was now, for she could never have seen her.

And Leila felt more drawn towards her rejected lover during these long invectives than she had ever been before. Dinner with his sunny face and golden hair op-

posite her would be a pleasanter meal than it was where her ears were deafened and her heart sickened by her father's opprobrious language. And now she drove through the darkness to Leighton Court, where he lay dying or perhaps dead, and her golden-haired lover sat opposite, much apologizing for his mud-stained dress, but otherwise scarcely speaking to her.

Leighton Court had blazed into brightness during its owner's absence. A huge fire burned in the hall, and the house-keeper, "his second mother," as her young master affectionately called her, came and conducted Leila to the room prepared for her, "as Sir George thought, Miss Radclyffe, that you would stay over the night, for he was sure Mrs. Radclyffe would not leave the Squire. It's Miss Conway's room when she is here, and I have got her boudoir ready for you, in case you like to use it."

Mr. Radclyffe continued insensible, and of course his wife would not leave him, even to eat. She watched him as solicitously as if he had ever been the most tender of husbands to her. Was it affection? Was it habit? Who knows? "A poor thing, but mine own," was probably the solution.

And Sir George, in the most unexceptionable of evening costumes, came down to do the honors of his table to his young lady guest, who, overpowered with enormous and unusual shyness, could hardly speak to him. He was kindly sympathizing and gravely polite, but made no attempt at confidential or intimate conversation.

It was very embarrassing sitting alone with him in his own house, at the table where he wanted her to preside for life. She fancied even the servants conscious, and the Conway ancestors gazing at her from the walls and greeting her as one of the family. And then came over her a vivid sense of "the changes and chances of this mortal life." For the last two months dinner-time at Deerscourt had been a sort of prolonged Ash Wednesday, during which a perpetual Communion Service was performed over the miscreant whose grave and graceful hospitality she was now receiving.

As soon as she possibly could she rose, saying she would go up to her mother. He held the door open.

"I hope Mrs. Edwards has contrived to make you some way comfortable," he said. "I told her to prepare Edythe's room for you in case you wish to go there. I have sent you up some of

Mudie's books, though I fear," he added with a slight smile, "they may smell of smoke, as I usually read them in my den."

"Thank you very much: it is most kind of you. I do not know how to apologize enough for the trouble we are putting you to," and in overwhelming confusion her thoughts went back to the shading trees where he had pressed burning kisses on her hand.

"Then don't apologize at all," with something of his old smile; "I am only too proud to be of any service to you."

He followed her gravely up-stairs to inquire for the invalid.

Mr. Radclyffe had recovered consciousness. His collar-bone and numerous ribs were broken. The serious thing was the fall on his head. Men who hunt have every bone in their bodies broken so often that it is marvelous how they exist.

The usual objurgative style of Mr. Radclyffe's utterances was now changed into a series of groans and shrieks. He was in a raging fever, and suffering agonies of curiosity to know where he was, his wife dreading to inform him for fear of a fierce outburst of wrath and imprecation; and he might insist on being moved on the spot. Would he, conscious, remain under the counter-jumper's roof? and what if Sir George should come in and hear him raving at him? but physical pain had tamed, for the moment, his blustering, bullying temper, and he heard the communication in silence, when made to him by the doctor.

"How did you get here, Mary?" he asked his wife.

"I drove over, dear. Sir George came and told me himself, and Leila and I came off at once."

"Is Leila here?"

"Yes, dear; I could not leave her, and she was so anxious about you."

He made no reply, but turned his face to the wall with a groan.

The following morning Leila had another *tête-à-tête* with her host at breakfast. Her father had had a very bad night: he was in great pain. A London physician had been telegraphed for, and the country Galen gave it as his opinion that it would be weeks before he could be moved, even if he recovered, which was doubtful.

His faults were all forgotten by wife and daughter; they thought only of his sufferings, of the pain-stricken countenance looking more deadly pale from contrast with his usual florid complexion.

Leila could not eat, nor could she restrain the tears that came crowding into her eyes. Even her fear of Sir George was forgotten.

"Do you think papa will get better?" she asked, looking imploringly at him.

"I think so; I hope so, certainly. Heaps of fellows break their ribs, you know."

"Yes; only papa is not young, and a fall on the head is always dangerous."

"Yes; that is the worst part of it, but he is sensible, which is a great thing."

"Mamma wishes me to return to Deerscourt, if you would kindly order the carriage for me."

"But you will come back here?" he said, his face perceptibly falling.

"I think not, thank you; mamma says I can do no good."

"But surely Mrs. Radclyffe must like to have your help."

"I cannot help to nurse papa," she said regretfully; "he won't let me do anything, and I am only in the way here."

"By no means," he exclaimed eagerly; "you can never be in the way. Let me entreat you to come back. How can you stay alone at Deerscourt?"

"Mamma has told me to write and ask Blanche Seymour to come and stay with me. I wonder Horace is not arrived yet."

"I wish you would return here, at least until Miss Seymour can come. I am sure it must be a comfort to Mrs. Radclyffe to have you with her. May I ask her to let you stay?" he pleaded.

"I should like to be near papa," she answered hesitatingly, "still, I think I ought to go, as mamma says so."

He looked at her tearful face, desiring to sympathize, yet, manlike, not knowing how to do so—full of admiration for her amiability and love for her mother; but he would not distress her by any demonstration of his own love.

"I wish you would try to eat something," he said kindly, after a pause.

"I can't," she answered, rising hastily, and going to the window to conceal a burst of tears. He waited a moment, looking at her as she stood, and then left the room quietly.

She, having dried her eyes, turned, and found she was alone. She gladly seized the opportunity of going to her mother, but on the stairs she met Sir George coming down. He stopped.

"I am so deeply concerned to see you unhappy," he said. "I could not bear the idea of your being alone at Deerscourt, so have got Mrs. Radclyffe's consent to your

returning here when you have given the necessary orders there. I hope you are not angry with me for having done so. I assure you, it is better for you."

"Oh, thank you," said Leila confusedly, not knowing what else to say. "You are most kind."

When she got home she found Horace, who had just arrived.

"Do you think Blanche will come?" he asked, when she had told him all the family plans.

"I dare say she will, but I don't want her, and wish mamma would not insist on asking her."

"Why don't you want her? have you quarreled?"

"Quarreled? no. The idea of quarreling with dear Blanche; but I think she is better away from Deerscourt."

He walked hastily to the window with a muttered oath.

"If you think she'll come, I'll go and fetch her," he said presently. "She is with the Maynards, and can't travel across country alone."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BLANCHE and her mother had gone down to spend Christmas with Mabel.

"My dearest," said the latter, when the sisters were alone, "I haven't asked any one except Charlie's sisters, two estimable and rigid old maids, who think he has made an egregious fool of himself by wiving with such a butterfly as myself. I waited to consult you. Should you like me to have Horace and Leila Radclyffe here?"

"Oh, no, Mabel dear," returned Blanche hastily; "let us be alone and happy. Yet, no! that's selfish! poor Leila would like to come, and as Edythe Conway is at Ventnor, Horace could go over and see her more easily from this. Do ask them." She spoke smilingly, but her color flitted to and fro painfully.

"Blanche, my darling one, how is it?" asked Mabel, her heart yearning as she saw the girl's efforts at forced cheerfulness, and throwing her arms round her. "Tell me, dear. Do."

"Mabel dear, I have nothing to tell," said Blanche resolutely.

"You don't look happy, Blanche. What business has Horace to go and see Edythe Conway?"

"Every business, Mabel. He wants to marry her."

"While he is in love with you?"

Blanche flushed crimson. "Mabel, marriage has spoiled you! You would not have said that a year ago. He is not—what you say, and never was. What right have you to say so?"

"The right of common sense. If he is not in—I mean if he doesn't like you, his looks belie him and his actions too; and I say he is behaving like a very bad man to go after Edythe now."

"Pray, Mabel, don't let us discuss Horace's private affairs. As a dear friend, I shall always like him more than any one almost, but in the way you mean he is nothing to me, absolutely nothing."

After this decisive remark there was nothing more to be said, but before the invitation could be sent Leila's letter arrived, and one from Mrs. Radclyffe to Mrs. Seymour urgently begging her to allow Blanche to go to Deerscourt. Horace wrote to Blanche saying that if she could come he would fetch her himself. Her impulse was to refuse. His presence was as much pain as pleasure to her now; she could not breathe freely where he was; the effort to seem as usual was so great while her heart was chanting a perpetual dirge for her vanished happiness; but she thought it cowardly to refuse when she could be of use, and after all, nothing could henceforth add to the misery of her existence; she would, therefore, go—and, in a couple of days, Colonel Radclyffe came to take charge of her.

He was ushered into the library, where she was standing alone by the wood fire. He came up, a joyful greeting on his face, and placing a hand on each of her shoulders, kissed her. It was a cousinly privilege he had claimed for some time, but latterly she had shrunk from it, she scarce knew why, though not knowing how to prevent it. She could not say, "You have no right to kiss me now." When he first assumed the right he said he did so as a cousin, and he was that still.

"And how does your suit prosper?" she inquired, after the details of his father's accident had been discussed.

"I don't know," he answered, dejectedly. "I never have an idea what to say to her."

"How is that? you are loquacious enough in general."

"I don't know, I'm sure. She looks awfully bored, I think, when I'm talking to her; and I'll be hanged, Blanche, if I don't feel bored too."

"That's a bad prospect," she said gravely.

"I fancy it would be better if it were all settled. Love-making is a deuce of a grind, Blanche, that's a fact! I mean, when one has to make a business of it. What ought I to talk about? I always can find plenty to say to you."

Some of poor Blanche's old fun and humor gleamed in her eyes at this *naïve* question.

"She is very much interested in her schools; why don't you talk about them? and then she is fond of reading and all that. You might speak of books, you know."

"Hang it all, Blanche? books are not in my line. I can talk to you about them, because you tell me what I ought to read and so on, but, I suppose, now, she would expect me to tell her?" and he looked for help to his trusty counselor.

"Tell her some stories. You often used to tell me very amusing ones."

"I can't all of a sudden jump into the middle of a story," he said despairingly. "I wish she was like you, Blanche, then I should get on swimmingly."

She was silent,—what could she say? and he resumed presently, after a long look into the fire, "She is a good girl, Blanche! it's odd, isn't it, having such a handsome fellow as Conway for a brother, that she shouldn't be prettier than she is?" He spoke as if Miss Conway's want of good looks were a personal injury to himself.

"I think she has something better than prettiness in her face. She looks so brave and good and true."

"It is quite possible to be brave and good and true, and very beautiful besides," he answered hastily, with a look she perfectly understood.

"I'll go and tell Mabel you are come," she said, and left the room.

The next day they started together for Winterton. They found Leila at Deerscourt.

"How is my father?" asked Horace, kissing her.

"Better. He has had a better night. Dear Blanche, I am so glad to see you."

"Had I better go over to Leighton to-night?" inquired Horace.

"No. Mamma said you had better stay here to-night and take care of us. Mr. Vivian arrived to-day with a lot of horses for hunting. It was a long invitation;—Sir George asked mamma if he should put him off, and she said, of course not. He wants to get Lady Eveleigh and Edythe

to come for Christmas, if Edythe's doctor will allow it; as it is so warm, he thinks it wouldn't hurt her for a week, and we are all to go over there, too."

"Will Edythe come?" asked Horace, not, it must be owned, as if the prospect were very delightful to him.

"I think so. Her brother is getting the house up to furnace heat in preparation for her visit."

"Then, Leila, it's no use my having come here," said Blanche; "you won't want me."

"My dear, we always want you; but I told mamma it was selfish to take you away from Mabel and Aunt Fanny now."

"I shall go back to Heathfield," said Blanche. "I don't want to go to Leighton, and Mabel was so anxious for me to be with her for her first Christmas there."

"And why should you go back to Heathfield, Blanche?" said Horace, his face darkening ominously.

"I can be of no use now," she said apologetically. "How can I see you devote yourself to Edythe?" she thought, bitterly.

"And do you dislike us so much that you won't stay unless you can be of use?"

"Aunt Mary especially asked me to come to be with Leila, as she would be alone here; she won't be alone, so won't want me."

"That's real nonsense, Blanche," he said angrily. "I gave you credit for more sense. What's the good of my having gone all that way to fetch you, if you want to go away at once?"

"Horace, I'm sorry you had the trouble; but it was your own doing. I could have come perfectly alone, and can go back so."

"You know quite well that I didn't think it a trouble; but why on earth do you talk about going away?" and he left the room.

"Why is he so angry?" asked Blanche, looking distressed.

"I'm sure I don't know. He is always angry about something. But, Blanche, you mustn't go back to Heathfield. Mamma did not know about our going to Leighton when she wrote, and Sir George pressed it so, she could not refuse, and then when papa heard you were coming he was so delighted, mamma wouldn't put you off. He talks every day about seeing you, and is looking forward to it immensely. You know how fond he is of you. He lets me sit and read to him now," she added with a gratified look.

"You have been staying at Leighton?" remarked Blanche.

"Yes; I only came back to-day," and she blushed.

"Leila, you will have to marry him now out of gratitude," said Blanche smiling.

"Do you think so?" she asked, but there was no longer the look of horror in her large gray eyes. "I hope he may not ask me again, as after all this it would be very hard to refuse. Blanche," and a burning blush covered her face, "you can't think how kind he has been, and one day,—it was very idiotic of me, but I was so unhappy about papa, I cried, and he was so nice about it, and took no notice, but left the room."

"The match was evidently made in heaven, Leila. You have done your best to escape, but fate has been against you."

Colonel Radclyffe came down to dinner feeling ferocious with all the world;—with Blanche for proposing to go away;—with her he was especially irate;—with his sister for her silent condemnation of his conduct; with Sir George for asking Percy Vivian and Edythe Conway to Leighton Court just at this time. He hated Percy Vivian intensely, insanely. He had looked forward to this Christmas with Blanche as a refreshment in the present dreariness of his life. He should have to do duty with Edythe all the remaining term of his natural existence—he never doubted her acceptance of his proposal when it should please him to make it—and felt that he might claim this holiday of which he now saw himself suddenly deprived. He sulked all through dinner. Leila was afraid of him, and Blanche had lost the spirit, which a few months before would have made her laugh him out of his bad temper. She ought not, she knew, to care whether he was angry or not, but we don't always do as we ought, and she did care excessively.

When he came into the drawing-room he flung himself on the sofa and buried his head in the *Times* without speaking.

She waited till tea was brought in, and then taking a cup as a peace-offering, went over to him, graceful and gentle in her floating white dress.

"Horace, I've brought you some tea." He started up.

"Oh, thank you. I beg your pardon a thousand times. Why did you trouble yourself?"

"You wanted some tea, didn't you?"

"Yes; no; thank you, I didn't care about it. Have you had any?"

"Yes, thanks."

"I should have come and given it to you only my society seems to be thought so very contaminating for you that I had better keep out of your way."

"What do you mean, Horace?" she said gently. She was standing by him as he sat scowling on the sofa.

"Leila, I suppose, has succeeded in inoculating you with some of her monstrous ideas," he answered angrily.

"What ideas? Leila has not said a word to me."

"Then what, in God's name, makes you talk of going away, because you can be of no use to us, as you term it?" And he flashed on her with jealous eyes.

"I am not going away now," she said softly; "but even if I were that is no reason you should be angry with me. Naturally I like to be with mamma and Mabel and Charlie at Christmas."

"I don't see what they want of you."

"What do you want with me, Horace?" she said laughing.

"I always want you," was the answer that rose passionately to his lips, but he suppressed it. "You are not going, then?"

"No; Leila begs me not."

"Very kind of her, I'm sure," he said sulkily.

"Horace, don't be ferocious with me," she said, sweet remonstrance in the eyes she raised to his face—he had stood up now—"open the piano, and I'll sing to you; perhaps that will mollify your temper."

His features relaxed a little, and he obeyed. Her singing "could charm the roughness out of a bear;" it charmed away his—he sat down near her, a look of contentment gradually stealing over his face.

"You are a fool and something worse," whispered Conscience and Reason alike. "You've always made it your boast that when you found yourself getting hit, you bolted. Why don't you bolt now? and why did you prevent her from doing so? why do you expose both yourself and her to such temptation?" And the sweet voice rose and filled the room with its melancholy cadence.

"Nor dream that Ambition can cure thee of Love"

she sang with Amynta's lover, and for a moment he thought, "Can Edythe sing like that? is it worth while, even for all

that money can give, voluntarily to abandon the happiness within my reach?"

And he dwelt with a feeling that was not vanity on the rapturous look of delight that would fill Blanche's lovely eyes, and bring back the lost, bright, sparkling manner he so regretted, if he said, "Blanche, poverty or no poverty, you and I must go through life together."

"Use not much the company of a woman that is a singer," says the much-experienced Eastern sage. Horace never felt thus tempted but when Blanche sang;—had she had the slightest idea of the effect produced on him, never a note would he have heard from her again, but she did not know, and sang on till the magical sound had almost vanquished his resolution. The voice ceased at last, and cold Reason came to his aid—"Probably you would have no piano for her to sing to. Her voice will get old and cracked, her eyes dimmed, her face wrinkled, while homely, unsinging Edythe's money is a substantial good of which Time cannot rob you."

CHAPTER XL.

BLANCHE sat in the library at Leighton Court by the only unstained window in the room, one that looked out on the quadrangle, where the fountain splashed perpetually.

The apartment was lofty and dark, with oak panels that glinted curiously with blue and red and green lights reflected from the gorgeous stained-glass windows through which the faint December sun came bringing a Christmas greeting.

That same sun cast a golden tinge round her brown head as she sat painting in water colors a carved oak screen opposite her.

Behind her, his arms folded, stood the Honorable Percy Vivian following attentively her every movement.

"Do you draw much, Miss Seymour?" he asked.

"I used, but I don't now. I haven't time at home, and one gets out of the way of it, only I wanted mamma to see this screen."

A pause.

"Mr. Vivian," said the young lady suddenly, "I wish you wouldn't look at me while I am drawing. I so dislike it!" She spoke impatiently.

He offered no word of apology, but walked round deliberately to the cushioned window-seat near her, and sat down.

"I thought ladies liked to be looked at and admired."

"That quite depends on who looks at them. You were not admiring me, but criticising my drawing."

"Do you dislike being criticised?"

"That, also, quite depends on the critic; but I am not gifted with the nerve of those remarkably head-gear'd young women who cultivate Art at the National Gallery under the eyes of an admiring public. Judicious criticisms from one's friends are different."

"You imply that I am neither judicious nor a friend."

"No, not exactly," she said, looking up or rather down at him; "though it sounded rather like it, didn't it?"

"Remarkably so. Do you consider me incapable of friendship?"

"I have no doubt you are a very true friend to your friends—to Sir George for instance."

"You don't number me among your friends, Miss Seymour?"

"No, Mr. Vivian," she answered smiling. "I should never dream that you would 'lower to the level,' as you would deem it, of being a woman's friend."

"Would anything induce you to look on me as a friend?" he asked after a long interval, during which he sat looking at her, not her drawing, his elbow resting on his knee and his chin supported by his hand.

"The word has so many meanings. If you mean as a friend to criticise my morning's work you are welcome," and she handed him her block.

"No," he replied, putting it aside, "I know you would not mind what I say: you would turn it into ridicule."

"I never ridicule what is kindly meant, Mr. Vivian. Tell me what is wrong in my drawing, and I will correct it."

"There is nothing wrong that I see: but would you really alter anything at my suggestion?"

"In my drawing? certainly. I am not so presumptuous as to reject good advice."

"Not in your drawing only," he said with impatience. "In other things?"

"I don't know about that. Perhaps if I thought the advice good I might take it."

"But you turned everything I said into ridicule at Ryde."

She blushed deeply, but looked at him

with laughter in her eyes. "Because I could not help it."

He colored now, and deeply, too, for the flush showed through his bronzed cheeks and brow.

"What could I do but laugh when you went about proclaiming that you considered one half the human race useless fools?"

There was another long silence, during which she painted away vigorously, and he sat, still contemplating her.

At last he rose and began hunting about from one book-shelf to another.

"Conway, or some one for him, has entirely upset all these books," he exclaimed impatiently.

"What are you looking for, Mr. Vivian?"

"What I came in here at first to find—an old edition of Shakspeare."

"Is there one here?" she said with interest. "I didn't know that."

"Do you ever read Shakspeare?" he inquired, suddenly turning round.

"Sometimes. When I've nothing else to do."

"Really?" looking earnestly at her, remembering the lesson he had received at Ryde.

"Really, Mr. Vivian."

"And do you care for him?"

"I'm not sure about that. I don't mind reading a little bit of him now and then."

He looked at her in uncertainty. "Should you like to see this edition? it is a very curious one, with notes on the margin by George's father, who was a great Shakspearian scholar."

"I should like it immensely."

"Then you do care for Shakspeare?"

"I don't know," she persisted; "but I should like to see this book. Curiosity, you know, is one of my useless sex's many crimes—at least men say so."

"It will take a long time to go through it, and I can't find it now. Will you come here this afternoon and look at it?"

"I should enjoy it of all things."

It was the morning after Christmas day. Mr. Radclyffe was mending, but it would be weeks before he could move, and in private the doctors said he would never be the same man again.

Colonel Radclyffe did diurnal duty gallantly with Miss Conway, and Blanche looked on and—suffered. To-day he came up to her after lunch. "Blanche, come for a walk; or will you ride?" He had been in attendance all the morning, and wanted relaxation.

"I can't do either, I'm afraid, Horace. I promised to look over some old book, supposed to be a great curiosity."

"Oh, nonsense. It's charming out. Never mind the stupid book, but come along."

"I can't, indeed. I promised."

"Promised who?" he questioned, as regardless of grammar as that jackdaw of celebrated memory.

"Mr. Vivian. He asked me."

A spasm of jealous rage and anger crossed his face. He turned very white. She was taking him at his word. What a fool he had been ever to trouble himself about her feelings. She did not and never had cared for him! He had no compunction in throwing her aside when she interfered with his interests, but woe to her if she did so by him! She looked in alarmed surprise at the storm her words had evoked.

"You are quite right," he said in a low, hard voice between his teeth; "of course I don't want or expect you to think of me." And he turned away with a fierce, muttered imprecation.

She, too, turned away with a bitter sense of his harshness and injustice at her heart. "He leaves me when it suits himself, yet expects me to be at his beck and call," she thought.

In the hall she met Mr. Vivian.

"You haven't forgotten your promise, then? I've found the Shakspeare. George had it in his room."

"Shall we look at it here?" she asked, thinking "if Horace comes he'll see I didn't want a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Vivian."

"Yes; we can put it on this table."

They sat down together in the deep window with the book before them, and went through the volume, no spirit of mischief prompting her to pretend ignorance;—her heart was with Horace, wondering where he had betaken himself in his wrath, whether he would pass through the hall; longing for the evening, when she should at least see him.

He came in once and cast an angry look of jealous fury on her. She was too proud to propitiate him, and returned his scowling glance with one of cold displeasure.

"Thank you, Mr. Vivian," she said, when they had arrived at the last page; "I have enjoyed it very much," which was a vile untruth on Miss Blanche's part, seeing she had been execrating both him and his book as the cause of her black-haired cousin's wrath. She rose to go.

"Miss Seymour," said that gentleman, "I want to know—is there anything I could

do that you would consider as giving me a claim to call myself your friend?"

Blanche opened her eyes at this totally unexpected query. "Mr. Vivian, that is a most appallingly serious question! What do you expect me to say?"

"I want an answer."

"Well, I can scarcely imagine such a contingency as our becoming great friends."

"Why?" he asked, a shade of mortification crossing his face.

"Because," she answered gravely, "the conditions of all real friendship would be wanting."

"How so?" he asked eagerly.

"True friendship implies equality. You study Shakspeare, therefore, no doubt, remember what he says on the subject."

"He says many things, if I recollect aright, but I don't know to which you allude."

"He says that—

'In companions

That do converse and waste the time together,
Whose souls do bear an equal yoke of Love,
There must be needs a like proportion/
Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit,'

and that can never be where one of the two thinks himself infinitely superior to the other. You would *condescend* to a friendship with a woman, and I should decline it on such terms," and she drew herself up proudly.

"Very fairly hit!" he exclaimed; "but suppose I disclaimed any idea of condescension, how then?"

"That could hardly be. The convictions of years cannot be thrown away in a moment. Yesterday you thought women an inferior order of beings, to-day you cannot honestly think them your equals."

"One's opinions may be in the process of change for some time, yet the conversion may seem sudden at the last. Besides, even a sudden conversion may be a very honest one. You believe that, don't you?"

"Ye-es, certainly;—in some instances."

"Then, I repeat, condescension or any idea of superiority or inferiority apart, would anything I could do for you make you number me among your friends?"

"That would depend. Why do you ask? do you think I come up to Hamlet's ideal of a friend?"

"I should like to know what you would consider as constituting a claim to your friendship."

"Let me see. Great friendships have been formed from very trifling occurrences. Two men became fast friends because one opened the door for the other. I rather think, too, the one who died first left all his money to the survivor. Do you ever

open the door for a lady? I fancy not. I've not seen you do so; but even such a favor would hardly avail to make us friends for life, I fear."

"Supposing I saved your life? Would that give me a claim on you?"

"Do you think life is such a boon that we need be grateful to those who save it?" she asked, looking at him with sudden gravity, reflecting how weary hers was now, and how little she valued it.

"Life ought to be a boon at your age," he answered, the lines of his face softening. "You would not wish to throw yours away?"

"I don't know, Mr. Vivian. 'The sooner it's over, the sooner to sleep,' you know, but I suppose suicide is a cowardly refuge from the troubles of life. I have no immediate intention of trying it."

"You haven't answered my question. Suppose I saved your life, would you let me be your friend?"

"Suppose ten thousand and two unlikely things happened, and you did it very romantically, perhaps I might," she returned laughing; "but allow me to remark *en passant* that I am not going to put my life in your hands."

"Still, should such a chance ever arise, I shall know what reward to claim."

"Remember, it is only if you do it in a very romantic fashion, or are nearly killed yourself, or something of that sort. If you fish me out of the lake, and don't get very wet in the act, it won't count. In fact, I shall think nothing of it unless you have a frightful cold in consequence, and have to give up hunting for at least a week."

"Perhaps some day you may find that my help is not to be despised, though it may not be offered as romantically as you seem to think desirable."

"I am not in the habit of despising either persons or things. I leave that for other people," with which parting shaft she left him.

She looked forward to seeing Horace in the evening, but the evening came, and evening the following day, and his displeasure was not appeased, and she went about with a heavy weight at her heart.

"To be wroth with those we love doth work like madness in the brain," and he was mad with combined love and jealousy, conflicting inclinations, bitter anger. He had been told he ought to leave her alone; he would do so; so help him Heaven as he would ever give her reason again to think he loved her. If he had failed in duty once he would not do so again.

Blanche's displeasure was never long-lived. She had but one wish now,—to hear Horace say, "All right, Blanche, I was an idiot to be angry." They met in Mr. Radclyffe's room—he was always asking for Blanche,—but beyond insignificant politeness nothing passed between them.

One evening she came across him in the hall alone. "Horace," she said, her breath coming thick, "why are you so angry with me? you know I would rather have gone with you, only I had promised."

"You were quite right, and I am not angry at all."

"Oh, Horace, when you look at me like that and won't speak to me!"

"I am not angry, I repeat, Blanche. I must go now. I came to get something for mother."

He walked away with his stately tread, a dark frown on his face, and the girl stood, perfectly motionless, with her large eyes dilated, for two or three minutes, then went swiftly up to her room, and sitting down at her writing-table, buried her head in her hands.

"If my wild falcon would away,
Think you I would bid him stay?"

The exquisite poem in which the lines occur had not appeared then, but the sentiment there so beautifully expressed was the one in her mind.

She loved Horace truly, as only a good and noble woman can love;—the knowledge born of suffering told her that she had not given her love unsought. Had he not singled her out, often against her will, and won her heart by countless acts of homage and worship as a young man, gifted with every outward grace and perfection, can win the love of a girl? That he was completely inferior to her and unworthy of her in every respect did not affect the matter. She was unconscious of it, and clothed him, in imagination, with the noble qualities of her own nature. When he came and told her he must sell himself for money, she hardly blamed him even to herself. Had she been Horace she would have set herself to work manfully for the girl she loved, and would have scorned to live on a wife's fortune; but she knew that men look on these things with other eyes than women, and that all the traditions of his class and position were against such a line of conduct. She had aided him with advice and counsel to the best of her ability, and had ever been ready to sympathize with him.

"Ever, be it east or west,
His falconry was on her breast."

Out of her deep love to him she would have been his friend, no matter what the effort cost her, as she could not have the first place in his life; and she could make every allowance for a fit of jealous anger, but this systematic and persistent neglect was another thing. If he cast her aside and repaid her true affection with scorn, she would school herself to be as proudly and coldly indifferent as he was.

Indifferent! Even as she thought the word a flood of tender memories rushed upon her. Could she ever become indifferent to that beautiful face, which always had met her with ready sympathy, responsive to her every look and tone? The memory of it, she knew, would haunt her night and day, till memory itself failed, but never again would she put it in his power to say, "I must go now, I am so busy."

Involuntary tears crowded into her eyes, but she resolutely drove them back, and rising, deadly pale, dressed for dinner and went down, her face now flushed and beautiful, to afford Mr. Vivian an interesting study in the new subject he had taken up.

He sat down by her on the sofa after dinner with a large portfolio of drawings. "I sent for these to London for you to look at. They are a collection of Shakespeare's heroines I have been making for some time. Does that amuse you?" he added, watching the smile that dimpled round her mouth.

"I should have thought his heroines the least interesting part of his works to you."

"I owe my acquaintance with you to this," and he held up an engraving of Portia in her gown and wig.

"One never knows what one is really like, looking-glasses notwithstanding; but I should not have fancied myself like that."

"Yes," he said, looking deliberately from the picture to her face, "there is a something that makes a likeness, though the features are different. I was reminded of this the moment I saw you at the Winterton ball."

"Was that why you asked me to dance, in spite of your misogyny?"

He started at the word,—mentally started, that is. We are all rather apt to shrink from having our own especial spades called spades to our faces.

"You mistake me quite. I am not a misogynist."

"Oh! I beg you pardon. I dare say, then, I have misunderstood the meaning of the word. It is derived from the Greek, I believe, so most likely I have."

"I have no doubt you fully apprehend the signification of the term," he returned; "but you are mistaken in applying it to me."

"Perhaps woman-despiser would be more applicable, certainly. Hatred implies some portion of respect."

"You think I do not respect any woman?"

She elevated her white shoulders and her straight eyebrows ever so slightly. "I only judge from your general style of conversation."

"And you consider a man quite worthless who does not entertain a deep respect for women, as such?"

"I have strong opinions on the subject, I will admit; but I won't go quite so far as that. I know many excellent women who have no appreciation of men; I think they are foolish, but by no means utterly worthless; neither do I consider a man so because he cannot appreciate women."

"Has it ever occurred to you that want of appreciation proceeds from want of knowledge? Had I known you sooner, Miss Seymour, I might not have entertained the opinion you so condemn."

"I am delighted, Mr. Vivian, at being instrumental in changing it," she returned, blushing; "but as there are five hundred women to be met with every day, better and cleverer than I am, who might have opened your eyes, I think your want of knowledge was, partly, at least, willful."

"Is the offense unpardonable, when I am willing to retrieve my error at the feet of such a sweet censor as yourself?"

"I had no intention of being your censor," she said hastily. "Every one has a right to his own opinions. I think women very good, you think them the reverse; but there is room for us both in the world."

"Then you have no desire to make converts to your views?"

"No. I don't think I have any vocation for being a social missionary."

He continued to show her the pictures, holding them patiently for her inspection, and watching the ever-varying expression of her face as she looked at them. The subject interested her, and she accepted thankfully anything that distracted her mind from the one point. She had no thought of marrying Mr. Vivian—her heart was not of the convenient Radclyffe

mould—but she conversed with him with pleasure, feeling, besides, that she owed him compensation for the ridicule he complained of at Ryde. It was natural to her to compensate to the best of her power for anything she had done to give offense or pain, no matter how unwittingly or unavoidably on her part.

“I don’t think that realizes Desdemona’s character,” she observed, as he held up an engraving of the Moor’s ill-starred wife.

“No? may I ask why?”

“There is too much firmness about the mouth and chin. Desdemona was essentially weak. That mouth and that chin might have been Portia’s when she started to plead for Antonio,” and she looked at him smiling.

“Don’t you admire Desdemona’s character?”

“Suppose the world were peopled by perfect *men*, I should think her a perfect type of a woman, but men being what they are, I prefer Portia or Rosalind, as fitter to cope with them.”

“Till I knew you,” he said, after a pause, “I always conceived that Shakspeare drew more or less on his imagination for his women; I see now that some must have been studied from life.”

“Do you think I should be as patient as Desdemona?” she asked, smiling her sweet smile.

“Perhaps not. She may have been weak, as you say; but you would be no bad representative of Portia.”

“You seem determined to establish my resemblance to her,” she returned lightly. “I wonder how I should feel pleading in court in a wig and gown?”

Horace watched her eager, animated countenance from his station beside Miss Conway, and hated her, and himself, and all the world. And Miss Conway watched them, too. She felt awfully bored. There was no attraction between her and the six feet of soldierhood beside her. They wearied each other to death, and she saw she was courted for her money while her would-be lover’s heart was with Mr. Vivian’s blushing interlocutor on the sofa. She wished devoutly she were there too. That cynical individual’s conversation and caustic manner had great charms for her—as his friend’s sister he had been less intensely disagreeable to her than to other women, and his coming could bring a beauty into the face which Colonel Radclyffe found so little attractive.

CHAPTER XLI.

BLANCHE passed a restless, miserable night, and rose in the morning determined to weary herself out by such physical exertion as must needs bring sleep to her aid.

Sir George had placed a horse at her disposal, which, he assured her, went like a lamb, his sister having ridden him frequently. She had had two or three rides with Horace, when Rory justified the commendation bestowed on him by his master. To-day she resolved to go over to Deerscourt; she wanted some colors she had left there, and the solitary ride, the air and exercise, would all be welcome.

The hounds met fifteen miles the other side of Leighton Court, so she did not think it possible she could encounter any of the huntsmen. The gentlemen had breakfasted early; the ladies, therefore, enjoyed that meal by themselves. “Edythe,” requested Blanche, “may I have Rory to take me over to Deerscourt this morning?”

“Of course, dear; but who will go with you?”

“No one. I can go perfectly alone, and shall enjoy my own company immensely.”

“Mamma has a dozen commissions to be done there,” said Leila, “so, perhaps, you can execute them for her.”

“Always provided she does not pronounce it not *comme-il-faut* for me to go alone,” laughed Blanche. “Aunt Mary spies want of *comme-il-faut*-ness in everything. It is the ogre she keeps ready to pounce out on one at all sorts of unexpected moments. I hope she won’t make it pounce now, and appeal to all my tenderest feelings to give up my cherished *tête-à-tête* with Rory.”

“I would not be pounced on,” said Edythe bluntly; “I hate the word *comme-il-faut*, and the thing too. Everything is *comme-il-faut* that one’s own heart does not tell one is wrong.”

“I think so,” said Blanche; “but one does undergo martyrdom in the name of propriety.”

“Lady Eveleigh is not quite such a slave to it as most people, I imagine,” said Leila.

Lady Eveleigh, be it observed, breakfasted in her room, so the three young ladies (Mrs. Radclyffe being in attendance on her husband) were at liberty to express their opinions, unshackled by the presence of vexing dowagers.

“Pretty well for that,” returned Edythe, compressing her lips; “she and George

are naturally born slaves to it, only I keep them in order. I live in a chronic state of rebellion against their despotism, and you would be surprised at the reforms I have effected by sheer dint of perseverance."

"Those cigarettes, for example, I suppose," said Blanche.

"Yes; that was one instance. How George fussed and fumed! He never was known to be cross, but the nearest approach to being so I ever saw in him was when I insisted on his letting me smoke one, as we were sitting out-of-doors one evening."

"What did he say?" inquired Leila.

"Oh, he said it wasn't nice for a lady—not refined, and all that. I told him all the foreign ladies did it, and then he couldn't help laughing, and so it was all right."

"As to that, all the old women in Wales and Ireland smoke," said Blanche; "still I confess I should not like to do it myself—it looks like a man."

"My dear child, you may just as well say it looks like a man to eat," returned Edythe bluntly. "No one detests *une homme* more than I do, but if a thing is not unfeminine in itself I don't see why you are to avoid it merely because a man does it too. That is just what I said to George and Aunt Kate. She nearly had a fit because I asked my doctor about it. Poor man! I pitied him,—he was on the horns of such a dilemma! He could not honestly say those little cigarettes were bad for me, and dreaded George and her ladyship if he pronounced openly in my favor."

"What put such an idea into your head?" asked Leila.

"George brought a box of them from Russia and made me try them; and then when I liked them, and asked for some more, he was as much horrified as Blanche is. I used to wait till he had one well lighted, and then snatch it away from him. I told him unless he got me a box I would write and order one myself."

"And did he?" asked Leila.

"Oh, of course, but under protest. He is quite reconciled now, however, and brings me some every time he comes, and lights them for me, even. What do you say to that, Blanche?"

"Oh, I know I am inconsistent, because in general I rebel dreadfully against their system of improprieties and proprieties. What I object to is, that they don't cry out against what is wrong, but against what is unusual. Everything must have

been done for the first time once, we may be sure; and if it is right and desirable in itself, why should not I do it simply because it has never occurred to Jane or Sarah to do it before me? But I'm not so brave as you are, Edythe. I can't persist in my originalities when I see mamma does not like them, or if Geof Rivers looks grave over them."

"You would not have smoked in the teeth of George's disapproval?"

"No; certainly not. I'm a terrible coward about vexing people if I care for them. Of course if they attempted to bully me that would be another matter."

"Well, in one way I think you are right; but your system is very apt to spoil people. Why give way to a senseless prejudice even out of affection? When you marry you will spoil your husband, and he'll bully you at the end of two years."

"If he attempted that we should have a rough time of it. I should rebel promptly."

"It's no use rebelling once you've let him get the whip hand of you. You must hold your own from the first if you want any sort of a decent life."

"Edythe, you talk like a book! where did you get your experience?"

"It's not experience, my dear: it is intuitive knowledge—a much better thing. What's the use of experience? it is like shutting the stable door when the horse is stolen."

Of course Mrs. Radclyffe protested vehemently against Blanche's going alone to Deerscourt, and foretold many misfortunes therefrom; but as the young lady persisted she produced the last arrow in her quiver, and threatened her with Horace's displeasure.

"I'm sure, Blanche, dear Horace would say it was anything but a proper proceeding on your part. You know how very particular he is about young ladies. Why, he wouldn't hear of your even coming from London alone. He will be anything but pleased, I can tell you, when he finds it out."

If Miss Seymour, already bent on her own way, had wanted a spur to her lagging resolution, this highly judicious remark would have supplied it.

"I should like to know," she exclaimed, her eyes flashing, "what possible business it can be of Colonel Radclyffe's where I go or what I do. If I choose to go from here to Winterton on Edythe's pet donkey I don't see that he has any right to interfere."

"Well, Blanche, I'm sure you needn't look so angry," whined Mrs. Radclyffe; "I've often heard Horace tell you you ought not to do so and so, and you have always minded what he said, and he wouldn't like you to ride to Deerscourt alone, and will scold me for letting you go."

"He must do as he pleases, Aunt Mary," said the girl, tingling from the top of her head to the soles of her feet; "only, if I were you and he scolded me, I should tell him to hold his tongue," and she kissed her to make amends for her hasty speech.

That an argument was the last she ought ever to have used never deterred Mrs. Radclyffe from bringing it forth, if it served, or she thought it could serve, her purpose.

Blanche went down to Miss Conway with a flaming face.

"Oh, Edythe, I've had a battle à outrance with Aunt Mary. She got quite angry with me; she says Rory will run away, or I shall be thrown and there will be no one to pick me up; that there are swarms of tramps and ferocious gypsies about pining to run away with young women; that a little dog may jump out and bark at the horse's heels and make him kick, and finally how dreadful it will look if I meet any one! I told her I would risk it all, gypsies included; so good-by, dear, I'm off before she comes down to renew the combat."

"Did she give you her commissions to do?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then her protest isn't worth much. Take care of yourself."

Blanche reached Deerscourt without encountering any of the perils her aunt foretold. She got through her work there, and about one o'clock started slowly homewards.

There were still three hours of daylight;—she thought of her sleepless night, of the furnace-like temperature of Leighton Court (the house was kept like an oven on Edythe's account), of the wearisome time she would have to spend in Mr. Radclyffe's room. "At any rate, I'll tire myself out by a good gallop over the downs," so she turned through the copse and over the hills, between the odoriferous fir woods with the dried and withered cones crackling under Rory's feet, till she came out on the open downs where she galloped away in delicious solitude, the free air blowing about her face and loosening her wavy hair, while

the leaden, wintry sky, like a great extinguisher, came down to meet the rising earth, and the lapwing uttered its melancholy, dirgelike cry, a fit accompaniment to her sad thoughts.

There was, of course, a Roman encampment—that self-asserting, robber-born* race has left its mark on every high hill—and a great battle had been fought in by-gone days, whether between Roman and Briton, Saxon or Dane, tradition and history had alike failed to determine. The camp and its battle occupied the room of the weather in the conversation of the aborigines of the surrounding country.

The painfully overpowering, mysterious thoughts which silence and the sole companionship of sky and earth give rise to filled Blanche's mind as she let Rory subside into a walk. What people had lived and suffered here? what God did they worship? to what future did they look forward? or did they live and die with as little reflection as the brutes (how often superior to their masters) that perish? did the air blow as sweetly, was the turf as elastic in those old-world times? and the young men and maidens, did they love and did they suffer? this last she was sure they did. The one thing that may safely be predicated of every child of Adam is that he or she has suffered, she especially. But did they love? she supposed so, though prenuptial love is not dwelt on in classic story;—those Saxon and Danish lads and lasses, however, our own kith and kin, they assuredly did. Was there among those gallant warriors one with blue-black hair and stately tread like her Horace? Hers? he was hers no longer. That sweet dream was a thing of the past, and to banish her wild regrets she cantered away over the springy turf again and down into the wood which would lead her to the high road.

Just as she reached the entrance of this wood a man of brigand-like appearance, with eyes as black as sloes, a neck and throat burned as brown as oak leaves in autumn, and well-exposed to view, issued from behind a tree and warned her, civilly enough, not to canter down the grass ride, before her, as there was a gypsy-cart there, and her horse might shy.

"Thank you," answered the girl; "it is very kind of you to have told me."

Her impulse was to give him a shilling,

* Pace Niebuhr.

but she reflected that it might be as well not to make such a wild-looking individual aware that she had a purse with her; she therefore restricted her sense of the obligation to words, and proceeded at a walking pace down the path. She had not gone very far when, as if by magic, a dozen uncouth figures, men, women, and children, started up round her.

"Lady," cried an Amazon, with a yellow handkerchief on her head, and a face which for blackness and wrinkles might have excited the envy of the most thoroughbred pug that ever won a prize at a dog-show, "cross my hand with silver, and let me tell ye your fortune."

"No, no," laughed Blanche, "I know it without your help."

"No, lady, how can ye? Silver, lady, and I'll tell ye where the black-haired colonel is, and how he's thinking o' ye at this moment."

Blanche flushed to the roots of her hair. "Seen me riding with Horace," she thought. "Let me go on, my good woman," she said aloud; "I don't believe in such folly."

"Not believe, not believe," cried the hag volubly, "when I tell ye he ought to be with ye at this moment. Don't I know he worships the ground ye tread on? Cross my palm with silver, lady, and I'll tell ye how to win him back from the lady at the big house yonder," and she laid firm hold of the bridle, while the men drew into uncomfortable proximity.

Blanche shook her reins. "Pray, move, my good people; I have no money, and my horse is restless, as you see. Let me pass on."

"Not till ye gi' us summat. Ye have money for the pikes wi' ye," said a surly-looking tramp, seizing the reins resolutely. "Gi' us summat," and he tried to open the saddle-pocket, while a villainously-visaged young giant on the other side seemed only waiting for a word to have her off her horse.

Mrs. Radclyffe's predictions flashed across her mind, but she was gifted with a nerve that never failed in the moment of actual danger. She struck Rory with her whip so as to make him rear, which he did violently, the suddenness of the movement forcing the man to let go his hold, and turning his head, made for the open country again, hoping thus to baffle her assailants. There was a loud shout from the angry crew behind her, but Rory galloped madly on, and she hoped she was safe, when the same man who had ac-

costed her as she entered the wood darted out, and seizing the bridle rein in a grasp of iron, effectually stopped her progress. She tried to free it, and even struck the man's hand twice with her light whip, which he heeded about as much as if a fly had lighted there, retaining his hold without uttering a word, while Rory kicked and plunged horribly (all sensible horses have an invincible objection to having their heads held). She felt no fear,—the whole thing was too sudden to allow of that. Her whole sensation was a vehement desire to keep her seat, not an easy matter when the animal one is riding shows a fixed determination to stand on two legs, instead of four, as Nature intended, and one's reins are frantically tugged at in opposition to such a determination.

The entire gypsy band came rushing up, whooping and shouting, adding thereby considerably to Rory's consternation, and nothing short of a miracle could have prevented her being thrown, when a blow from a hunting-whip, delivered with rather more effect than her abortive stroke, freed the bridle from the gypsy's hand.

Horse as well as human nature can be goaded too far, and Rory had borne a good deal to-day. He was an equable-tempered, sensible Irish quadruped, long-suffering, too, in his way, for in his heart he hated a habit as much as the veriest misogynist hates a petticoat, yet he bore Blanche safely with equine heroism, submitting to her gentle guidance, and evincing sublime patience under the infliction (irritating in the extreme) of a flapping thing, for which his utmost sagacity could discover no use. But now he had been hustled and whooped at, struck too, an event of unusual occurrence, especially when the reins were in such light hands, and a fit of ungovernable temper seized his ordinarily placid mind. The moment his head was released he plunged madly forward, very nearly unseating his rider, and then righting himself dashed away over the downs at a breakneck pace.

In vain Blanche tried to stop him. He was beyond all control, and she could only clinch her white teeth and resolve not to faint if she could help it, though the rapid motion through the air would, she felt, in a short time deprive her of consciousness, even were she not dashed head foremost into a yawning chalk-pit for which her gallant steed was making fast, with that admirable instinct by which a runaway horse invariably directs his course towards the very most dangerous point

within a radius of ten miles of the spot whence he started.

She had cast one glance on her deliverer as she saw the heavy hunting-whip descending on the brown hand. It was Mr. Vivian. How he got there she had no time to think.

Had King Solomon been a sportsman he would probably have added to the four things hard to be known, the way of a fox with the hounds. The wily animal had on this occasion taken an unusually erratic course, and had afforded both his four-footed and biped pursuers fine sport; in other words, they had had a splendid run, which terminated at Iley chalk-pit, where hapless Reynard, having struggled gallantly for his poor life, was run to earth at last, and yielded up the ghost in the jaws of his exasperated enemies.

Mr. Vivian was a heavy weight and his horse had done a good day's work, but he hated Horace Radclyffe, and rather than ride back to Leighton Court in his company, he turned away over the downs, preferring to lengthen his road if only he might have it to himself.

As he went slowly on he saw on the hill before him, in clear relief against the leaden sky, a slight figure on horseback cantering towards Iley Wood. A woman on horseback was not a sight that particularly attracted Mr. Vivian. A vague, passing wonder how she kept on seated in such an abnormal manner was his chief, in fact, his only sensation on the matter; sometimes he cast a careless glance on the animal she rode, but seldom even that. The horse that carried a woman must partake of her inferiority. The being who philosophized with Gerontius, after he had "shuffled off this mortal coil," did not entertain a more supreme contempt for Adam

("The thing which for his help must needs possess a wife")

because his Creator found him unable to stand without that happy after-thought, than did Mr. Vivian for the horse that bore a lady. A few months ago even the rarity of an equestrian in such a locality would not have induced him to give a second look, but now the image of Blanche Seymour would recur to his mind like the *refrain* of a song, and the rider before him reminded him of her. He had seen her on horseback, with Horace in attendance, and had watched him assist her to mount and lift her down with a mingled sensation of contempt and anger. Instinctively he quickened his pace and then slackened it again, ashamed of the hope that the girl he saw might turn out to be

his bright-faced antagonist, whose quick retorts and laughing eyes were so frequently and uncomfortably present with him. The ride home, he knew secretly, would be pleasanter with her, but he persuaded himself he did not think so, and would not give his horse extra work for any woman under the sun.

Presently the lady, too, slackened her pace, and he was gradually gaining on her, without, of course, hurrying himself in the least, when she set off again at a quick canter, and did not stop till she reached the wood.

He had now turned the brow of the hill, and could command a view of all that took place. He saw the gypsy address her—saw her ride on, and then return to find her progress arrested rudely and her horse driven almost to madness. All his misogyny vanished on the spot—he felt only the man's instinct to protect the weak; consideration for his horse was at an end, and he came down like an avenging deity on Blanche's astonished assailant.

His interference did not pass unresented. In an instant he was surrounded by the brown-visaged vagrants, who tried to pull him off his horse; but not in vain had he traveled all over the world, and faced infuriated Bashi-Bazouks, and struggled with enraged descendants of Ham in that pest of modern society—Africa.

He hit out right and left with his heavy whip, making Black Ben (his horse) plunge and kick violently and breaking through the band, galloped as hard as he could over the downs again.

He saw Rory (he had recognized him and his rider fully before he reached the scene of action) make for the chalk-pit. It was hopeless to pursue. What chance was there of his tired beast, heavily weighted, overtaking one that bore so light a burden? and even had he succeeded in getting near, the sound of the pursuer's hoofs would goad Rory on, and probably precipitate the disaster he wished to avoid. His only chance was to get to the pit first. He knew that by going through the fir-wood he could do so, but there were two formidable fences to be encountered, of which, had Black Ben been fresh, he would not have thought a second time, but which, in his present jaded condition, were a serious consideration. The risk was great either way. He spared neither whip nor spur, though his noble horse, as if divining his intention, strained every muscle in that frantic race.

He fully expected, on reaching the goal, to find Rory come up riderless; he could not conceive that Blanche could keep her seat. He was only just in time to spring to the ground and twist the reins round his arm, when, a mass of foam and at a headlong, furious pace, his girlish rider still on his back, Rory came dashing on.

Suddenly Mr. Vivian darted forward, and seizing the bridle, forced him back on his haunches. His mad career was stopped, but the shock flung Blanche from the saddle. Her head came against a sharp stone, while her foot remained caught in the stirrup. The keenest pang Mr. Vivian ever felt shot through him when he saw the blood start from the fair delicate temple.

He hardly dared to move, and expected a violent plunge from Rory every second, but the animal had exhausted both his strength and his temper, and stood like the veritable lamb to which his master had compared him. As if conscious of his fault, he remained quite still, though panting and trembling, while Mr. Vivian, having taken his own reins from his arm, gently freed Blanche's foot. He tied both horses to a stunted bush growing near, and then, kneeling beside the insensible figure, reverently raised the head so as to examine the wound. He applied his own handkerchief to stop the bleeding, and a sickening sense of horror came over him as he looked at the marble face. "Good God! if she should be dead!"

But she was not. The motion, as he raised her, brought back consciousness. She opened her eyes, and met his bent on her in overwhelming anxiety.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed fervently. "Are you much hurt?"

"Not much," she murmured faintly, and then, her eyes closing again, she said something of which the only word he could catch was "saddle-pocket." He hesitated in perplexity, and then laying her gently down, proceeded to examine the place in question. Its contents were a purse, a handkerchief, and a small bottle of *eau de Cologne*. Which she wanted he could not divine, so brought all three, and raising her again, and supporting her head on his knee, he took a flask of brandy from his pocket and applied it to her lips.

"I'm not fainting," she said presently, opening her eyes; "not that," trying to motion away the brandy, "my own bottle."

With trembling, nervous fingers, little

used to handle feminine belongings, he opened the smelling-bottle, much wondering what it contained, and placed it to her lips. She was too weak at that moment to raise her hand to remove it, but turned her head a little away, which movement sent the contents over her face and neck. The smarting, burning sensation effectually restored her consciousness, and with it came a perception of the absurdity of the situation,—Mr. Vivian, in full hunting costume, enacting the part of squire of dames out on the open downs!

"I didn't want to drink it," she said smiling, "it is *eau de Cologne*; I only wanted some on my handkerchief, but I'm all right now. I can sit up, I think, thank you," as she became aware of her proximity to his scarlet coat and of his arm round her.

"You had better wait a little," he answered, unwonted softness in his voice, and a novel feeling of tenderness and protective yearning coming over him. "I'm afraid you are very much shaken. Is your head painful?"

"No: I don't feel it so."

"I wish I could stop the bleeding. Brandy will do it—I forgot that."

"Brandy? is my head cut?" and she put up her hand.

"Yes; and bleeding a good deal. You fell against that stone there. Brandy might stop the bleeding, but it smarts a good deal. Can you bear it?"

"Oh, yes."

He poured some on his handkerchief and applied it to the cut, which was really trifling, though it bled a good deal, and his nervousness made him exaggerate it. She turned deadly pale the moment the brandy touched it, and he thought she was going to faint again. She uttered not a sound while he pressed the handkerchief to her brow. "You are very brave," he said, watching her face; "I'm afraid it hurts you terribly."

"I think if the bleeding is stopped, I might put a piece of sticking-plaster on, and then I should be all right," she returned, anxious to free herself from his arm.

"Have you any sticking-plaster?" he asked eagerly.

"I have some court-plaster in my purse." He handed it to her, following all her movements as she opened it and took out a square piece.

"I had no idea you had any with you. It's the very thing. Let me put it on. I'm a tolerable doctor, though I fear you

think me a cruel one;—the brandy hurt you a good deal?"

"Pretty well," she said with a smile. "Thank you, that will do capitally. Where did you come from?" raising her eyes, which met his as he bent over her; "I did not see you."

"I came here to prevent Rory carrying you into the chalk-pit."

"I had prepared myself for his stopping short there; I didn't think he would jump over. I did not see you; had I done so I should have known what you meant to do, and not have fallen off in that strange fashion."

"My wonder is how you kept on so long. I can't sufficiently express my admiration at your courage and presence of mind. You behaved splendidly, if you will allow me to say so."

She smiled. "What brought you up here? Surely the hounds met the other side of Leighton, at Three Oaks."

"Yes; but we had a long run, and killed at the pits here. I was riding home over the downs when I saw you."

"I can quite well sit up now; thank you so much for all your kindness."

He released her, and, rising himself, stood looking down at her.

"I don't know what Aunt Mary will say," she continued. "She foretold that I should be upon by gypsies. I simply did not believe such a thing possible in England."

"Scoundrels!" said the gentleman between his teeth. "How will you get home? I can't leave you alone here while I go for a carriage."

"I shall ride home. Rory is quite good now; only extreme aggravation made him run away."

"Are you not afraid, or too much shaken for that long ride?"

"By no means. I'm quite well now, and up to anything. We shall be benighted if we don't start at once."

He assisted her to rise, and offered his arm to lead her to her horse.

"I think, if you would allow me, I could put you up," he said, "though I dare say you will think me awkward."

Never before in his life had he placed even a child on horseback, but he acquitted himself very creditably of his unaccustomed task. They set off at a quiet pace and in complete silence. Suddenly Blanche, blushing, turned to him with a look of mirth in her eyes, "Are we to go about henceforth labeled as professed friends?"

He smiled a smile that softened his

whole face, effacing every harsh and sarcastic line, so much so that she felt startled at the change—but did not speak.

"Do you remember what you asked me the other day?" she continued.

"Perfectly; but I did not know if you would consider that I had fulfilled the conditions you attached."

"You saved my life, didn't you? I should scarcely have survived had Rory taken a header into the chalk-pit, as you say he contemplated doing."

"How little I should have cared had I not," was her secret reflection, yet she thanked God for her safety. Human nature is very inconsistent.

"Yes; but you may not consider that I did it in a sufficiently romantic manner. I did not get wet through, for example."

"No; but you have half killed your best horse, which you think worse, perhaps."

"Rather. I don't think much of a wetting."

"Which means that you think a good deal of your horse."

"Yes, I do," he answered gravely, "but in your service I should not have minded had he sustained three times the injury he has."

"Mr. Vivian, you are improving. That was a very charming compliment."

"It was not a compliment. It was the truth."

"Why, that is a greater one still. If you go on at this rate you will end by being a complete ladies' man."

"I will confine my allegiance to you, Lady. You have won it, and no one else shall ever have it."

His gravity alarmed her; and Leila's lament about the miseries of being proposed to recurred to her mind.

"I won't be quite such a monopolist as all that," she answered lightly, "but seriously, I hope Black Ben is not much the worse."

"I don't care if he is."

"But is he?"

"No, nothing to signify; only, I suppose, you will now consider my claim on you less."

"You can't really think that, Mr. Vivian. I am truly grateful to you for all your exertions in my behalf. I feel your kindness deeply, only it is not always easy to say what one means," and transferring her whip to her left hand, she held out the other one to him. He took it in his. "Then you will let me call myself your friend?"

"Certainly; you have proved yourself

so, I'm sure," and they rode on again in silence.

He avoided the wood, to spare her any further risk, in case her old enemies should prove troublesome, and they reached Leighton Court as the brief daylight was almost at an end.

She was so exhausted that when he lifted her down she staggered. He hastily put his arm round her to support her, and when she steadied herself he placed her hand in his arm, to lead her in. Horace Radclyffe, looking by chance from his window, muttered many a fierce oath, while angry, restless anxiety seized him as to what could have happened to her, whom he should ever consider as his own property. What right had Mr. Vivian to ride with her? to lift her down, and lead her about? and how came he to be with her? had she appointed to meet him? Even in his solitude and jealousy he repudiated the thought, feeling ashamed of having harbored it for a moment.

"As your friend," said Mr. Vivian as they went in, "I am going to prescribe for you. You ought to have some port wine and keep quiet in your room till to-morrow."

"The blessed privilege of friendship is, Mr. Vivian, that one is always at liberty to reject one's friend's advice, and I shall certainly reject yours. Aunt Mary will be triumphant enough as it is, but if I once made an invalid of myself I should be 'done to death' with reproaches and nursing combined. No, no; you will have the felicity of seeing me at dinner to-night."

"But you will take some wine now?"

"No; I shall have some tea."

"Oh, then, let me get it for you. Where can I find some? I'll send my servant for the housekeeper."

"Please don't," she exclaimed, amused at his eagerness. "I'll ring my bell, and Leila's maid will come."

He had led her up-stairs. "Thank you again and again, Mr. Vivian. I can get on quite well now."

"Let me take you to your door, and then I will find Miss Conway and send her to you."

Edythe was reading in her boudoir when Mr. Vivian, who had the *entrée*, but rarely availed himself of the privilege, knocked at her door. She well knew his knock and step. His coming and going were no matter of indifference to her. "Come in," she said, changing color.

"Miss Conway, I have come to trouble you. I think you could be of use to Miss Seymour. She has met with an accident."

"What? is she hurt?"

He detailed all the circumstances, reverting again and again to her courage and presence of mind. Edythe went off at once.

"My dear Blanche, I'm so sorry. Mrs. Radclyffe must have hired those gypsies as an express warning to all young women of an independent turn of mind. Providentially you are not dead! are you much hurt?"

"Not at all: only a little cut on my head."

"A visible proof of the disapproval of Providence, my dear. You must never ride alone *no more*!"

"How Aunt Mary will go on, Edythe! That is my only dread."

"Percy Vivian is so excited, Blanche. It has shaken him out of himself for once. He has discovered that a woman can keep her seat on horseback and sometimes knows what she is about."

"The first feat has astonished him immensely," said Blanche, laughing; "he has told me so several times to-day."

"He came up just at the right time for you. Did he take tolerable care of you?"

"Excellent. He emptied a bottle of *eau de Cologne* over my face trying to force it down my throat, and put a *compresse* of brandy on my bleeding head."

"Pleasant and cooling, but his intentions were evidently good. He has surrendered at discretion, Blanche. You are a born conqueror to have vanquished such a stubborn foe."

Mrs. Radclyffe's excitement was extreme. Had the gypsies carried Blanche off bodily she could not have made more fuss. She tried to insist on her going to bed, but Blanche proved again a determined rebel, and maintained her resolution of appearing at dinner. "What will Horace say?" was the thought that occupied her mind.

When she came into the drawing-room, an unusual pallor on her sweet, bright face, and the patch of plaster on her white temple, he was coming forward to speak to her, but Mr. Vivian was nearer the door, and forestalled him, and Sir George came up to express his regrets that such a disaster should have befallen a lady on his property, and that Rory should have falsified his good report of him. Horace drew back full of jealous bitterness, while the girl's heart ached for one word from him, and his own conscience smote him for his unkindness.

Lady Eveleigh liked Blanche excessively. Her nephew's preference for Leila

Radclyffe was an unceasing source of wonder and regret to her. "But men are so obstinate, my dear," she remarked plaintively to her niece; "they never will take advice about these things." What an infatuation was it that induced him to want "that lump of ice," Leila, when there was Blanche Seymour, a girl any man might be proud to call his wife, bright yet tender, clever yet tractable, firm yet yielding—all that Heaven designed woman to be at her best, and yet he turned away from her to cry for such a one as Leila, cold, selfish, unsympathizing! Edythe represented that Leila was neither selfish nor unsympathizing, and that neither George nor Blanche cared a straw for each other.

"That's just it, my dear; George is so stupid! Why doesn't he try to make her care?"

And now the old lady overwhelmed her with attention, making her lie on the sofa after dinner, and waiting on her herself, as if she had been Edythe in one of her attacks of illness.

As she was thus fluttering over her, Leila came down from her father's room. "Blanche, papa is so anxious to see you: he keeps on asking when you are going to bed, that you may pay him a visit on your way. Mamma wants him to settle for the night, he is getting so restless. Could you manage just to come up and see him for a minute?"

"Of course; I'll come at once."

Privately Lady Eveleigh thought it very selfish to disturb Blanche, but the Radclyffes were George's guests too, so she held her peace on the subject.

"Now, my dear, you must let George give you his arm to go up-stairs."

"No, thank you, Lady Eveleigh; I am quite able to go alone, I assure you."

"No, no, my dear. Here, George."

He and Mr. Vivian both came forward, Horace looking on gloomily.

"As I have been your doctor to-day, don't you think I ought to see you up-stairs?" inquired Mr. Vivian, in calm defiance of the six pairs of amused eyes round him.

Blanche looked embarrassed. It may be pleasant to be a conqueror, but it is very trying to have one's little victories thus proclaimed in full conclave.

"Thank you, Mr. Vivian, but I really need no assistance."

Sir George drew back, his eyes twinkling, and as the other gentleman stood, offering his arm, she had no alternative but to take it.

"Why did you not go with her, George?" said Lady Eveleigh reproachfully.

"Aunt Kate, you would not have me interfere with Percy's education, which is progressing so admirably under Miss Seymour's auspices. Is it not?" he continued, with a smile to Leila.

"Yes; I am so amused."

"We won't laugh about it, though," he said gravely, "for fear of putting a stop to it; and Glennorth is so anxious he should marry. Do you think Miss Seymour would be inclined that way, Miss Radclyffe?"

"I really cannot say," was of course the reply, at the same time she could not refrain from casting a glance at Horace.

"It is well to be you," Edythe had whispered to Blanche regretfully as she kissed her, "to have all these men contending for the honor of taking you up-stairs."

Blanche thought sadly how little she cared while the one whose homage she valued stood coldly aloof. He had sat beside her at dinner, impelled thereto by the longing to be near her, and had expressed some murmured regrets at her accident, but had not otherwise addressed her.

"Halloo, Blanche!" exclaimed Mr. Radclyffe, as soon as she entered the room, "so you nearly caught goose. — rascals! Conway ought to set the police on their track! They know a deal too well to set foot on an inch of my property. Not much hurt, are you, eh?"

"Not at all, Uncle Charles; only a little cut on my head."

"No more rides alone, eh, Blanche? Mrs. Radclyffe is in an awful state."

This affords an opening for a homily from that lady. She was in full swing, Blanche sitting by the bed and Mr. Radclyffe laughing, when the door opened and Horace came in. He had waited in the drawing-room to give Blanche what he considered a reasonable time with his father, and then came up, assuring himself he did not want to see her, and that she was, of course, gone to her room.

"Now, here is dear Horace," continued Mrs. Radclyffe, "and I am sure he will bear me out in what I say. Horace, I do wish you would give Blanche a severe scolding; she minds what you say, though it's no use my speaking. She ought not to ride alone, yet here she is, persisting there is no harm in it, and she would go again to-morrow. Do just speak to her about it?"

"Now, Blanche, you'll catch it over the eyes and ears from Horace," said Mr. Radclyffe laughing. "Rather hard lines to have them both down on you, isn't it?"

"But I protest, Uncle Charles. I came to pay you a visit, not to be scolded, so as you don't protect me, I shall go away. Good-night; I hope you may sleep well. Good-night, Aunt Mary; you mustn't scold me any more,—I don't like it."

"I suppose you won't accept my arm?" said Horace gloomily, as he opened the door.

"No, thank you; I can go quite well alone."

"Yet you took Vivian's," he said savagely, following her.

"Because I could not refuse without rudeness."

"You didn't mind refusing me," he answered harshly. "Mother is right. You ought not to ride alone, and you needn't if you had not chosen to throw me over; though you were not alone, as you had Vivian."

She was weak and shaken from all she had gone through, and large tears rushed to her eyes. "Horace, you are very unjust. I never threw you over. How could I, when you have always been so kind to me till just lately. Then and since I told you I was very sorry I could not go with you that day." She swept away the tears that began to fall.

"It looks like being sorry when you are more intimate than ever with him."

"Horace, I don't know what you want me to do. If you will only tell me, I'll do anything I reasonably can to please you. I won't ride alone again, as you say I ought not. I do not seek any intimacy with Mr. Vivian, but I cannot and will not be rude to him, especially after his kindness to me to-day."

"Kindness!" he exclaimed contemptuously; "any one would have done the same."

"Probably; and I should have felt under equal obligation to any one who had, but no one else was there to do it, though it was quite an accident my meeting him."

"Iley Wood and the downs are not on the road to Deerscourt, that I know of."

"Horace!" she cried indignantly, "do you mean to imply that I have said what is untrue?"

"You know I don't, though I can't conceive what took you to Iley Wood."

"It was pleasant riding, and"—"I was so unhappy," she was going to say, but

pride checked the expression, and she substituted, "I had nothing to do here, and I thought I would ride back that way."

Her voice shook, and she looked so pale that compassion got the better of his anger.

"You are very tired," he said, more gently; "you won't take my arm or ride with me, but I suppose you will let me get you a candle? and I advise you to go to bed."

"Horace, I will take your arm if you wish it," she said, placing her hand in it. "Is it any use my repeating that I did not refuse to ride with you?"

There was a long oak gallery to be crossed to reach her room.

"Vivian ought to have stopped your horse at the wood," he said, as they went along, "and not have let him run away with you like that."

"He couldn't, because those people set on him, and Rory went like the wind."

"Oh, of course, I know you think all he does perfect now," he answered bitterly. She did not speak till they got to Edythe's boudoir, where the candles were; then, in a quivering voice—

"Good-night, Horace; some day you may find out how unreasonable you are, and how unjust to me," and taking her candle, she shook hands and left him.

That was the bitterest moment of Horace's life. He had quite good feeling enough left to know how badly he was behaving—how utterly selfish and like that of a dog in the manger his conduct was; he was partly aware, too, though not fully so, how he was outraging the girl's heart, and for the fiftieth time the angels of light and darkness struggled fiercely for the possession of his soul. He returned to his father's room and went through the usual routine while that internal strife raged.

"Is she gone to bed?" inquired Mr. Radclyffe, as if there had been no other she in the world.

"Yes; she looks very much shaken."

"Not a bit," said the old gentleman. "she's a plucky little thing—she'll be none the worse for it."

"I hope you spoke to her about riding alone, dear Horace," said his mother; "she won't mind any one but you."

He laughed constrainedly. "Oh, she's all right, mother," he replied evasively; and then he went down-stairs, and on his way he met Miss Conway, and smoothed his face into smiles to greet her. He could not afford to let her see his real self. She must know nothing of that war that was going on in his mind.

He certainly did not give her credit for much perspicacity. His natural simplicity was such that he really imagined he was concealing everything from her, as a child fancies it is unseen when it covers its eyes, the truth being that Edythe, a most sagacious young woman, read him as clearly as she would have read a book, and had about as much idea of marrying him as of espousing the man in the moon. When she first discovered his intentions respecting her she had deliberated as to his eligibility, and had given him a trial, so to speak, but she speedily saw there could never be any real sympathy between them; she could never get beyond the surface, and her mind was an unknown quantity to him. Besides, she had an uncomfortable suspicion that the relations between himself and Blanche Seymour had not been solely of that fraternal nature he wished her to suppose, a suspicion which was confirmed by a few days' residence under the same roof with both, and she would no more have robbed her friend of her lover than of her purse.

She did all she could do in her own house to discourage his attentions and let him see how little she desired them, but it was not easy without discourtesy. Girls are often unjustly blamed for encouraging a man, when, in fact, they do all they reasonably can to discourage him and show with how little favor they regard him.

"Is Blanche still in Mrs. Radclyffe's room?" inquired Edythe; "I was coming up to see her."

"No; she has been gone a long time."

"She looks very pale after her day's adventures."

"Yes, she does," he returned. He could never get much beyond monosyllables in his conversations with Miss Conway.

"You will have to give up a day's hunting to ride with her, Colonel Radclyffe, when she wants to go again. I suppose Mrs. Radclyffe will hardly consent to any more solitary excursions?"

"No; she is very much put out about it. Blanche ought not to have gone."

"Oh, nonsense! what could she do? she had no one to go with. You could not expect her to stay at home because there was no gentleman to ride with her."

"Well, you see the consequence," said he smiling.

"Yes; as I say, you will have to give up hunting and go with her next time," all of which was meant to convey to Colonel Radclyffe that Miss Conway neither

desired nor claimed any exclusive right in him.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE strongest feeling in Percy Vivian's mind was his affection for his brother, Lord Glennorth, and next to that his regard for his friend, Sir George Conway.

His birth cost his mother her life, so that no sweet womanly influence had blessed his childhood. His father followed his wife speedily to the grave, and the two little boys were left to the care and under the guardianship of a bachelor cousin, an honorable man, but harsh and unsympathizing. He sent them to school as soon as he could possibly do so; and, deprived of all other love, the brothers clung to each other with almost passionate devotion. They went to Eton and Oxford together, and shared the sports and occupations of manhood as they had those of childhood and boyhood. Never had they been separated; never had a cloud disturbed that perfect intercourse till, on their return from a tour in America, Lord Glennorth fell a captive to the beautiful face of a niece of his former guardian's, who had bloomed into womanhood during his absence.

To his brother's intense disgust and dismay, he offered her his hand after three weeks' acquaintance, and was accepted. It was the first break in their friendship. Percy resented the step highly, and visited his displeasure on the innocent cause. He knew nothing of women, and took no pleasure in their society; and this marriage, which deprived him of his brother, his comrade, his all in the world, turned the indifference with which he had always regarded the sex into absolute dislike. He could scarcely persuade himself to be present at the ceremony, and started to travel for several years directly it was over.

The union proved happy in all respects but one. Lord and Lady Glennorth were childless, and as time went on they became intensely anxious that Percy should marry; but his peculiarities increased with age and the nomadic, solitary life he generally led, and there seemed but little probability of his gratifying their wishes.

The natural sweetness of Lady Glennorth's disposition was such that he had not been able to retain his anger with her on his return after five years' absence

Time, the great healer, had reconciled him to the loss of the exclusive possession of his brother, and his friendship for Sir George had in some measure compensated for it.

Lord Glennorth unceasingly lamented Percy's idiosyncrasies to his wife, and devised many pleasing little schemes to correct them, but in vain; and finally he began to think her in the right when she said, "It is no use keeping on at him, Philip; it only encourages him in his oddities. Leave him alone; some day, perhaps, he may come across a woman who will cure him of his folly, in which case he will marry, and if not, why then, he must remain as he is. Urging him does no good," so the subject was never alluded to now.

Sir George, knowing the anxiety of the Glennorths on the matter, heroically restrained his natural inclination to "chaff" his friend about Blanche, and on the night on which the events last recorded took place both sat in the Baronet's den and smoked their regulation pipes in solemn silence, Horace having taken his departure unusually early, in order to sit up with his father.

When Sir George left him, Mr. Vivian lighted an extra cigar on his own private account, and walked up and down, up and down, much ruminating on the novel element which had come to ruffle the calm of his philosophical existence. He deliberately considered the step of asking Blanche to be his wife on all sides. It would immensely gratify his brother and sister, he knew, but he had not hitherto felt bound to sacrifice his ease on the altar of fraternal affection, though the natural effect of Lord Glennorth having ceased to press matrimony on him had been to make him experience sundry visitings of compunction for not complying with his wishes. He did not for a moment try to persuade himself that he was acting to please his brother, but the knowledge that that which he was contemplating would do so did weigh with him. Besides, he was thirty-eight years old, and at that period of existence the domestic hearth begins to present attractions unperceived at eight-and-twenty. He was honest with himself, as it was his nature to be: he took pleasure in this girl's society; she interested him more than any one or anything had ever done before, and he probably as much exaggerated her perfections now as he had depreciated them before. Her grace and beauty, too, exercised a charm over him, which he

could not resist. But would she accept him? He, of all men, could least brook to be refused. He knew so little of women and their ways that he had not the slightest idea what her feelings regarding him might be; and for the first time in his life he wished for his sister-in-law's advice. As Edythe Conway, when cogitating on a similar subject, thought of Blanche Seymour, so he now thought of Horace Radclyffe. He had always been very observant of Blanche, even when he professed a particular dislike to her, and had not failed to remark the vivid blush that dyed her face whenever that *beau militaire* came into the room. Such an oft-recurring sign was significant, even to him. That Horace liked her he did not doubt; but would he marry a portionless girl? he fancied not; and in that case what would she do? He had heard that if a woman could not marry the man she liked she would take another, but he could not believe so of this girl. He *felt* she would be true to her own heart; and these considerations induced him to pause before making an offer which might be rejected. He would wait and observe a little longer, though he longed for his former repose which this sweet, tormenting vision had come to disturb, on which he looked back even now with a feeling of regret, and which there was no chance of his regaining till his fate should be decided.

Blanche was very late for breakfast the following morning. Horace had finished, and was lingering restlessly, hoping to see her before he went out.

"Is not Blanche coming down?" he asked Leila at last in a low voice.

"Yes; only she is very late."

"How is she this morning?"

"Pretty well; quite well, she says. She looks a little pale."

"I'm going over to Deerscourt if you or she want anything." And then he went up to his father.

When Blanche made her tardy entrance she found she was not the last. Indeed, it would have been difficult, consistent with putting in an appearance at all, to be later than Mr. Vivian always was; and to-day he came down even more behind time than usual.

"How are you after your night's rest?" he inquired, taking his seat beside her. "How is your head? I hope you slept after all your adventures?" to all of which queries Miss Seymour returned suitable replies, while the rest of the company maintained a discreet silence.

"I have had a letter from Lady Glennorth which I think will interest you," he went on presently. "She has had an accident out riding, too."

It was the first time he had ever alluded to his family to her, and she felt an uncomfortable qualm as to what it portended.

"I hope she was not hurt?" she remarked courteously.

"No; but frightened a little, and my brother very much so. She is not as courageous as you are."

"Perhaps she was in more danger?"

"I will give you her letter to read after breakfast, and you can judge for yourself. I think you would like her, and I'm quite sure she would like you."

"Edythe has told me she is charming."

As they were leaving the dining-room he put Lady Glennorth's letter into her hands. She sat down in the deep hall window to read it, and having done so, looked up and saw him standing by the fire. He came forward. "You see I was right in saying she is not so courageous as you are."

"And I was right in saying she was in greater danger, probably. It was a mercy she was not killed."

"Yes; thank God she was not. It would have broken my brother's heart."

"Lord Glennorth, I conclude, then, does not share your—what shall I call them? your peculiar theories about my sex?" she asked, laughing.

"He is wrapped up in Nina," he replied somewhat gravely, avoiding a direct answer.

"And she equally so in him?"

"Yes; I think so, certainly." He came over and sat down at the table—the same at which they had examined the Shakespeare—and placing both his arms on it, said deliberately, "Lady, will you allow me to ride with you one day? I should like to do so very much. I was prepared for that look in your eyes," he added, watching her face, "but you are aware that all converts have to undergo a certain amount of ridicule at first."

"I was not ridiculing you, Mr. Vivian."

"Not exactly; but you think it perfectly legitimate to be highly amused."

"I respect a person immensely who has the courage to renounce an erroneous opinion."

"Do you?" he exclaimed, looking pleased. "So do I. I never join in the

outcry against a man who has changed his mind on some great political question, for instance, unless, of course, it can be proved that he does it from a base motive."

"Progress ought to be the law of mankind," said Blanche, glad to turn the conversation from personal topics, "and the man whose mind progresses must necessarily change his opinion from time to time."

"I quite agree with you, and am glad to think that though you may laugh at me you do not despise me."

"Mr. Vivian, I have told you already, I think, that I do not despise any one, and, most assuredly, I do not despise you."

"Will you show that you do not by letting me ride with you the next time you wish to do so? you have seen that I can assist you up and down."

"I don't doubt your efficiency in the least, and should be most happy to ride with you—only"—she hesitated, coloring painfully.

"What?" he inquired.

"Horace's anger would know no bounds" terminated the phrase in her own mind. "I must ask Aunt Mary," was the audible and somewhat impotent conclusion. He looked disappointed and a little surprised.

"Yet you sometimes act independently of her—witness yesterday."

"Yes; but if you knew how I got scolded! I was lectured on all sides for my enormities."

"And with some effect, I see, though I heard you contemplated a repetition of the offense."

"Who told you so? I certainly do not."

"Then you will let me attend you?"

"Why, you will be hunting, Mr. Vivian," she said laughing, and meditating means of escape up-stairs.

"I do not hunt every day; besides, I should not do so if you wanted me. Will you ride to-morrow?"

"Mr. Vivian, I could not promise without asking my aunt."

"But you will, if she allows you?"

"Yes," said she slowly, and even he noticed that there was no alacrity in the tone. "I must go now, I'm so late, and I always read to Uncle Charles after breakfast. Thank you for showing me Lady Glennorth's letter," and she withdrew.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A FEW days after the events above related had taken place the whole party at Leighton Court were seated at luncheon. Lady Eveleigh was arranging the different expeditions for the afternoon.

"And what should you like to do, my dear girl?" she said, turning to Blanche, who was sitting near her.

That young lady had kept herself disengaged in case Horace, who was neither hunting nor shooting that day, should ask her to go with him, but as he did not, she replied that she should join the walking party.

"Miss Seymour," said Mr. Vivian, who was on the other side of Lady Eveleigh, "you said you could not ride with me till you had consulted Mrs. Radclyffe. That is almost a week ago."

Blanche turned the color of a full-blown peony, and involuntarily looked at Horace, who sat opposite in the gloomy silence which was now becoming habitual with him.

"Have you not found time to ask her yet?" continued Mr. Vivian, some sarcasm in his voice.

"No—I think—I don't quite know," said poor Blanche, in extreme perplexity as to how to avoid being ungracious to one lover without infuriating the other.

"What?" asked Mrs. Radclyffe. "What do you want to ask me, dear Blanche?"

Edythe Conway dexterously knocked down and broke the glass of hot-house flowers near her, sending the water all over the table.

"Oh, George, quick, quick! Come and hold up the table-cloth. The water will be all over Leila's dress. How stupid of me!"

Five minutes of great excitement followed, and when they subsided again both Edythe and Blanche hoped the ride was forgotten. But no. Mr. Vivian had not the least intention of being ill-natured, but he did not understand Blanche's embarrassment; and as he had set his heart on riding with her, he saw no objection to appealing openly to her aunt.

"Mrs. Radclyffe, Miss Seymour would not consent to ride with me till she had got your permission. You will give it, won't you? I will promise to take the greatest care of her."

Mrs. Radclyffe had heard of Mr. Vivian's heresies respecting the sex, but as she had mixed very little in the family circle at Leighton, being constantly with her husband, she was not aware of his conversion, and opened her eyes in utter and ludi-

crous astonishment at the question addressed to her.

"My stars and garters!" she exclaimed—and the expression, vulgar as it *looks* and sounds generally, was not so coming from her lips, owing to a certain genuineness of surprise there was in it. "Why, Mr. Vivian, I thought you hated ladies, and said they were bores, and never spoke to them, which, I own, I always thought very bad taste on your part."

There was a burst of laughter from all but the gentleman concerned, who never moved a muscle, and the unfortunate Blanche, whose burning face bent every moment lower and lower on her breast. Had Horace not been there she would have been equal to the occasion, but his presence deprived her of the power of anything save blushing painfully, overwhelmingly.

"That is a mistake, Mrs. Radclyffe, as you must perceive by my asking you to allow Miss Seymour to ride with me," replied Mr. Vivian, with imperturbable coolness.

"Oh, she may go with you, certainly. Her going alone I do object to strongly. It is not *comme-il-faut* to see young ladies galloping about the country by themselves, is it, Lady Eveleigh? It was never done in my young days, that's all I know."

Girls suffer much from what their mothers did in their young days. "I'm sometimes tempted to wish mamma had never been young!" exclaimed an aggravated maiden on one occasion. Blanche and Leila both devoutly wished at this moment that Mrs. Radclyffe had never been so, and the latter young lady added the aspiration that it had not been the fashion to swear by your stars and garters during the period of maternal adolescence.

"In that case, Miss Seymour," said Mr. Vivian, still with an unmoved countenance, "may I ask George to order Rory?"

Blanche looked like an animal driven to bay. "Thank you," she began, but Lady Eveleigh interposed. "Percy,"—she had known him for years, and always addressed him by his Christian name—"I think you had better make your arrangements after lunch." She spoke in a low voice.

"Why, Lady Eveleigh! Miss Seymour said she would ride." It was meant for an aside, but every one could hear; and Blanche, escape being hopeless, faced the dilemma.

"Mr. Vivian, as Aunt Mary says I may, I shall be happy to ride with you."

An *embarras de richesse* may be an evil

(it is one which thousands of impecunious mortals would gladly endure), but an *embarras de prétendants* is, as Pet Marjorie remarked of nine times nine, what nature itself cannot endure. It was not a case of "how happy could I be with either" with Blanche. She had a very distinct idea which she preferred, but as fate was against her she could not let that one's unreasoning demands render her unjust and uncourteous to others, yet she hurried up to her room after lunch feeling thoroughly wretched and "badgered"—there is no more expressive word in the English language—and sat down, wishing she might never see a man again.

There was a knock at her door. "May I come in, Blanche?"

"Yes; come in, dear." It was Leila, who went up to her and kissed her.

"Blanche, darling, I was so sorry for you at lunch! What a stupid man that Mr. Vivian is!"

"Yes; only he does not mean it; but it is fearful to be *affichée* like that. Leila, I hope Horace won't mind my riding with him,—won't think it unkind, I mean. I have not been able to get out of it, you see," and she looked at her uneasily.

"He has no business to mind, Blanche, and I should not care if he did." Leila felt very angry with her brother.

Mr. Vivian was waiting for Blanche in the hall. He came forward to meet her as soon as she entered. "The horses are just coming round. Where shall we go?"

"I have no choice. Anywhere you like."

As they were riding down the avenue he said, "Lady Eveleigh has been telling me that I was most awkward in my manner of asking Mrs. Radclyffe's leave for you to ride. I sincerely hope I did not distress you. I had no intention of doing so, I can assure you. I had not the least idea there could be any objection to my speaking about it at lunch any more than at any other time."

"Nor was there, Mr. Vivian."

"But she says it distressed you; did it?"

"No—yes. Mr. Vivian, I will tell you the truth," and she looked at him frankly, yet with a glowing face. "I hesitated because I did not know, I was not sure, whether my Cousin Horace might not think it unkind of me to ride with any one else. I have always hitherto gone with him."

"Did he want you to go with him to-day, then?"

"Oh, no; but don't you know, if you have always been in the habit of doing a

thing with a person, they think it odd if you suddenly take to doing it with some one else?" replied Miss Seymour, getting entangled in her grammar in her extreme embarrassment.

"Do you think yourself bound to be guided by his opinions on all occasions?" asked her companion gravely.

"No; but I never like to do anything that may seem unkind."

"And you consented to ride with me to-day only because you thought it unkind to refuse?"

She was silent.

"Was it not so?" he repeated

"Partly so; I thought it very kind of you to offer to come with me."

"Then it affords you no pleasure individually?"

"On the contrary, I am very fond of riding, and always look forward to it with delight: only as you asked me, I told you the truth."

"Thank you; I quite understand;" but he did not in the least. "You and Colonel Radclyffe are very intimate?" he resumed after a pause.

"Yes; he has been so kind to me. He knew I liked riding, and that, owing to circumstances, I could not indulge in such a luxury in London, so he has always lent me one of his horses at Deerscourt, and wanted to bring one over here for me, only Sir George offered Rory instead. That is why I was so anxious he should not think I threw him over in any way about it: don't you see?" She put that query, as some people have a way of doing, as though it must convey to the listener all that was passing in her own mind.

"Perfectly, Lady, and I deeply respect your motive."

* * * * *

It was the last evening of the Radclyffes' stay at Leighton Court. Mr. Radclyffe was well enough to be moved, and was most anxious to return home, in spite of his host's entreaties that he should prolong his sojourn. He had completely changed his opinion of Sir George, and was now as ecstatic in panegyric as he had formerly been violent in denunciation. Sickness, too, had tamed him, and a certain generosity inherent in him made him ready to acknowledge kindness received. Dinner at Deerscourt would no longer be accompanied by a continuous diatribe against the upstart baronet—a consequence of the paternal accident which Leila by no means regretted.

"I always told you, Charles, that he was the best and most delightful man in the world, only you would not believe me," said Mrs. Radclyffe.

"I hate a counter-jumper so!" pleaded the gentleman.

"That's such nonsense, Charles. We're a nation of counter-jumpers. Half our great families were founded by what you call money-grubbers. Besides, Sir George isn't a counter-jumper," she concluded.

"But let us admit that he is, Aunt Mary," said Blanche, who was present. "'A man's a man for a' that,' and if Sir George is a specimen of counter-jumpers in general, they must be a delightful race of people. I wish Ralph was a counter-jumper."

The subject of this interesting discussion had been most guarded in his intercourse with Miss Radclyffe during her residence in his house; never showing by word or look that she was more to him than any other young lady who might be staying there; he would sing if she asked him to do so, knowing that it gratified her, and was in good spirits for the evening if she played his accompaniments; but on this last night he permitted himself to sit down beside her on the ottoman after dinner.

"Miss Radclyffe, I can't say how sorry I am you are going away."

"Indeed, Sir George, I don't know how we are to thank you for all your kindness. Mamma was saying to-day how overwhelmed she feels by it."

"It has been a great pleasure to me. I can safely say I never spent so pleasant a Christmas at Leighton before, and I am only grieved that it is all at an end."

"I hear Lady Eveleigh and your sister are going too."

"Yes; my aunt thinks it too great a risk to keep Edythe here, so I'm sorry to say they must go. Percy and I will be left in solitude. How do you think he'll like that?" and he glanced towards him as he sat by Blanche.

"Not at all, I should say," she answered laughing; "but he will often find his way over to Deerscourt, I suppose."

"Of course; he must go to inquire for Mr. Radclyffe, mustn't he? I shall come to inquire, too," and for an instant his eyes rested anxiously on her face to see how she took the remark. She blushed, and he felt his spirits rise.

"One of the benefits your visit here has conferred is that," he went on, indicating Mr. Vivian and Blanche.

"Is she not charming?" said Leila warmly.

"Charming, indeed! It would be the making of Percy if she would have him. She has improved him immensely already. Don't you think so?"

"Yes; he certainly is less selfish and more agreeable."

"He isn't really selfish. You don't know what a good fellow he is at heart: generous as can be, and ready to do anything for a friend."

"Is he good-tempered?" asked Leila, whose experience led her to think that the first requisite in a man.

"He is even-tempered and takes things quietly—that is part of his philosophical creed, you know: nevertheless, Glen-north says he can fire up uncommonly at times; but I've never seen him do so."

"Have you known him long?"

"Yes: his mother and my dear mother were great friends. When my mother came to live here, which she did not do for some years after her marriage, she was very anxious to have the two boys for their holidays always, but their guardian, who was a crusty old bachelor, would not allow it. He stayed here once himself, and was so horrified at the way my poor mother spoiled me, that he would never let them come near her."

"Did your mother spoil you dreadfully?"

"Just about," and his blue eyes softened with the tender recollection. "I didn't approve of going to bed, and used regularly to set up a howl, after the manner of small boys, when my nurse appeared, which disgusted old Vivian terribly. He prognosticated all sorts of direful things of me in consequence of my mother's over-indulgence, and she used to retort by telling him he was ruining her poor friend's children by over-severity."

"And did she never see them?"

"Oh, yes; she used to go and pay them visits at Eton, but it was not like having them here. She was particularly fond of Percy, but said he was being spoiled for want of some woman's influence."

"Were you at Eton with them?"

"No; they are both much older than I am. I came across Percy in a curious way some seven or eight years ago. I had my yacht at Queenstown, for the regatta, and was stopping at the Imperial Hotel at Cork. One day as I was going in I saw a weather-stained individual in a pilot jacket and glazed hat, with a most disreputable-looking carpet-bag in his

hand, inquiring for rooms. 'Och, thin, your honor, shure it's ourselves that id be p u if we could accommodate ye,' said the waiter, 'but sorra a chornor have we, the hotel is so full.' 'Go and ask if I can't have a bed for to-night. I don't much care where it is, so as it is clean!' 'Och, shure, yer honor, it's the misthress tould me I was to say we hadn't a corner left to hide a flhy in, let alone a Christian.' 'Oh, never mind your mistress, Pat; go and ask your master.' 'Shure my nname isn't Pat, yer honor, but Mike. Is it the masther ye'd be maning? Faix, it's himself that wouldn't know whether there was a bhed or not. Sure it's the misthress that knows all about it. Will I call the misthress to speak to yer honor?' said Mike in a most insinuating voice. 'Certainly not. Can you tell me where I am likely to find a room for one night?' 'The divil a bit, yer honor. The place is all full, more by token, as the steamer from New York puts down a lot o' phassengers to-day.' "

Sir George told Irish stories capially, and Leila never failed to laugh when he took off the Paddies.

"Well?" she said, interested.

"Why, then, I offered him my room for the night, or longer if he liked, as I could easily sleep on board the yacht: he was very much obliged and all that, and turned out to be my mother's old friend, Percy Vivian, just come back from America."

"How curious! how did you find out? did he tell you his name?"

"Gave me his card, and we have been great allies ever since. He remembered my dear mother quite well. I think she was the only woman he had ever felt the slightest regard for."

"Is Lord Glennorth like him?"

"Yes, and no. He is fair and Percy is dark, and Glen isn't so original and clever. Still you could never doubt their being brothers."

"Is Lady Glennorth nice?"

"Very. She and Glen are a model couple—devoted to each other," a smiling glance of intelligence at her, which she quite understood, and turned away her head.

Meantime Horace made dreary love to Edythe, who was turning over in her own mind whether any means could be devised for bringing him to the point at once, and so getting rid of him, and he was thinking how soon he could with decency propose, and ascertain whether this nightly drudgery would do him any

good. If they were engaged, he thought they might get on better. How he wished it was all over and they were married and done for!

CHAPTER XLIV.

ON their return to Deerscourt Blanche was anxious to go back to her mother, but Mr. Radclyffe showed the greatest reluctance to part with her. His comparatively helpless condition and entire want of resource in himself made her ready aid invaluable. Leila, with the best intentions, could not soothe his irritability, and amuse him as she could. He would not hear of her going, declaring her mother could not want her as she was with Mabel, and she had unwillingly to consent to remain, eagerly as she longed to escape from the roof that also covered Horace.

That gentleman's temper was becoming a sore trial to his mother, who piteously lamented that it was her hard fate to be a martyr to men's tempers all her life! Since his illness her husband had become more amenable; and now Horace, who used to be her main stay and support, was unbearable! She was sure it was because he was not married; if only he had a wife he would be happier, and all would be well, which, translated out of the Radclyffe dialect, meant that then his wife would have to endure his temper instead of his mother.

"Can you think, Blanche, what is the matter with him? He is so cross, my dear, there's no living with him! He is ten times worse than his father. Don't you think he'd be better if he was married, dear?"

"Perhaps, Aunt Mary."

"I do wish, like a good Blanche, you would tell him so. He minds you so much, you dear girl, and is so fond of you. Don't you think Edythe Conway would marry him? I wish he would ask her. Will you speak to him, dear?"

Blanche smiled, thinking sadly how little prompting he had needed from her. That ride with Mr. Vivian had been the crowning drop of bitterness in his cup. Beyond the barest conventionalities he never spoke to her; never asked her to write his letters or consulted her about his affairs; but avoided her in every possible way, living out-of-doors all day, and in the evening sleeping or reading. And the girl went on her way in dignified silence, too high-minded to show

what she was enduring. Never had he admired her more than at this moment. Her self-command and courage increased to the utmost the reverence he had always felt for her, and added ten-fold to the difficulty of giving her up. He was miserable, depressed, morose—a torment to himself and to every one about him. His father raved against his temper—as if his own had been perfect, and inveighed incessantly at his wife for having spoiled him. But though utterly wretched, Horace would not renew the intimacy he had once broken off. What he began in anger he carried out in cold blood, not by any means unmindful of the additional suffering he was inflicting on his victim, but a tardy sense of honor, faint, indeed, and almost cruel, under the circumstances, prompting him to make this sacrifice. Two or three times his resolution failed, and he said a few kind words and smiled with his old smile, and on these she lived for weeks, for week after week passed, and she was still at Deerscourt. Lady Eveleigh and Edythe had gone to Ventnor, but Mr. Vivian was at Leighton Court, and rode over constantly, adding thereby considerably to the sweetness of Colonel Radclyffe's temper.

The February days were lengthening out, and Sir George Conway's senatorial duties summoned him to London. There would be no master of the Leighton Hounds during these coming March runs,—a deputy would be master,—and Sir George rode over to Deerscourt to pay a farewell visit.

Leila and her mother were out driving, and he found Blanche and the Squire dowering about the garden. After a time Horace came and took the latter away to inspect a dog, and Sir George declining to follow, continued to walk with Blanche, which fact is a proof that he must have had something very important to say to her.

"This is my last visit here, Miss Seymour; I'm off to London to-morrow," said he rather dolefully. His honors were a heavy burden to him at this time.

"You will be down at Easter, I suppose?" she replied, consolingly.

"Hardly. I think of letting Leighton Court. I know of a good tenant."

"Letting it, Sir George? Why, you told me you were so fond of it. And who is to hunt the country?"

"Edythe can't live there, and it is very dreary being there alone. If I were married it would be different."

"And why don't you marry?"

"Can you, who know so much, ask me that?"

"Shall I give you a piece of advice, Sir George?"

"Certainly, Miss Seymour. Anything you say is sure to be right."

"Try again."

"I would not persecute any lady by my addresses."

"Ladies have been known to change their minds. Try again."

"Do you really mean that?" he asked, his face brightening up.

"I do; but if you betray me, I'll never speak to you again, and I won't give Leila a wedding present when she marries."

"She's afraid I shall bully her," he said, unutterable wonder in his face.

"Never mind what she's afraid of. Try again." And then Mr. Radclyffe and Horace rejoined them, and Blanche hearing the carriage wheels, ran away to meet Leila.

"Sir George Conway is here, Aunt Mary:—come to say good-by."

"Oh, my dear, let me go to him!" exclaimed Mrs. Radclyffe, almost tumbling out of the carriage in her excitement. "He is the best man in the world, and I never can thank him enough."

Leila got out more leisurely.

"Sir George says he is going to let Leighton Court," observed Blanche.

"Why?"

"He says it is so dull and lonely, as Edythe can't live there with him."

Miss Radclyffe said, "Oh!" and walked into the house in silence. But a great fear took possession of her. She ran hastily up to her own room for safety. Should she meet Sir George, how could she say "No," after all his kindness, should he again ask her that fatal question? Without waiting to think she rushed up to the attics, and out of a window which opened on the roof. She scrambled, pantingly, as if the enemy had been on her heels, over the tiles, till she came to a small door which took her into a lumber-room whence she could escape by the offices to an old apple-loft—the paradise of her childhood—which commanded a view of the avenue, and was unrivaled as a post of observation. In this loft she had often hidden with Horace in the days when the object of his life was to escape from a private tutor whom his mother persisted in engaging for his improvement—alias torment—during the holidays, and whom he naturally regarded with abhorrence. Its ex-

istence was almost unknown save to themselves and the gardener, and the strictest search failed to discover them once they retreated there, as it contained a hole in the roof into which they could thrust their small persons, and thus baffle detection.

To this asylum Leila now repaired. The combined odor of apples, bats, and other abominations almost stifled her when she opened the door, but what was that compared to the horror of encountering Sir George Conway? She shut herself carefully in, and stationing herself at the aperture that served for a window, waited tremblingly till she should see him ride slowly away under the bare, wintry trees, as was his wont. A watched pot proverbially never boils,—she waited and waited, but he whom she looked for never came. “Oh, misery! they have asked him to dinner!” She began to feel chilled, standing by the opening after her rapid run,—and in the silence strange voices filled the place. A bat flew from the roof, disturbed by the sudden admission of light—some mice were careering about in happy security, and a pair of whiskered long-tailed rats were carrying on a gladiatorial combat in one corner. She gathered her petticoats up round her and watched in terror, lest they should approach her. Then she became aware of a black shiny monster crawling along the floor, leaving a slimy trail. Escape from a lover was dearly purchased by such horrors! Suddenly she heard a sound that banished such trivial fears,—her brother’s voice calling her. A vague, unreasoning dread seized her. Were they going to bring her in by force and make her marry against her will? Would Horace think of searching the apple-loft? In a paroxysm of fear she sprang on to the window-ledge, a jump which in cold blood she could assuredly not have accomplished, and thence into the hole in the roof, which had sheltered her during many a childish storm. For years the bats had held undisputed possession of this enchanting spot, and this sudden inroad into their premises sent them flying and whirring about in all directions. Leila, like all delicately organized beings, had a creeping antipathy to every sort of vermin, but the greater fear overpowered the less;—bats were dreadful, but marriage was worse, so, though she started back in affright, she would not get down again. She withdrew to the remotest corner of her salubrious hiding-place, but in doing so forgot that she had con-

siderably increased in stature since the days when she used to frequent it, and her head came in violent contact with a rough beam. She staggered back, stunned with the pain. Bats, slugs, black beetles, mice, rats, Sir George Conway, all danced before her eyes in wild confusion. She threw her dress over her head to keep all noxious things from her face, and sat unconscious, she knew not how long.

When she recovered at last she was chilled and stiff in every limb, and the silence and darkness, oppressive enough to be felt, struck her with a feeling of alarm. How had she got there? was she a small child again, hiding from her governess with the prospect of not going down to dessert before her as a penalty, which she, however, welcomed as a reprieve, as she thereby escaped her father? When she remembered all she started up, picturing to herself the hue and cry her mother would raise if she missed her. How long had she been there? In rising she knocked her head again, but contrived, nevertheless, to grope her way down—no trifle—and to pull out her watch. It was not so very late, and Mrs. Radclyffe might not have taken fright; but was the enemy gone? To what purpose had she faced innumerable abominations and nearly split her head open twice if he was still there? She stood listening, to hear if Horace were still calling, but no sound save the cawing of the rooks and an occasional quack from the ducks, striking incongruously on her highly-wrought-up nerves, met her ear, so she resolved to reconnoitre. At all events it was better to face the danger than to suffer her mother to have the lake dragged in search of her. She reached the orchard in safety and hoped she might be equally lucky in getting to the house, when she heard her brother’s voice. “Halloo, Leila, where the deuce have you been? I called you till I was hoarse, and mother has sent every servant about the place after you. Where have you been?”

“Oh, about in different places.”

“Where? why, what a mess you are in! what have you been after?”

“Nothing; I’ve been about the yards and orchard.”

“And never heard me call? uncommonly deaf you must be!” and he glanced sharply at her. “Conway has been here, and wanted to say good-by to you.”

“Is he gone?” she exclaimed in alarm.

“Yes; he waited some time, but as we couldn’t find you, he had to go. Why wouldn’t you come and speak to him?”

"How could I know he wanted to see me? besides, I didn't want to see him."

"So I perceive. It strikes me you have been hiding in the apple-loft?" and he caught hold of her suddenly. "Now, confess; haven't you, Leila? I wish I had thought of it, and I'd have gone and brought you down very soon."

"Oh, Horace! no, you wouldn't," she implored.

"Then you were there? By Jove! what an idea! do you mean to say, child, you went there really to hide from Conway?"

"Oh, Horace, you won't tell mamma? Please don't, Horace!"

"Then, upon your honor, Leila, don't you ever mean to marry him?"

"Never."

"And don't you ever mean to marry any one?"

"Never. I wish Sir George would go away and leave me in peace. There are hundreds of girls who would delight in being Lady Conway; why can't he take one of them?"

"Because he likes you, and as he is rich he can choose for himself, not like a poor devil who must take what he can get. Do you suppose if I were Sir George I'd marry any girl but Blanche Seymour? not if she refused me twenty times!" he added almost fiercely. "I'd have her at last."

"Then do you think he'll go on wanting me to marry him?" she asked in alarm, the allusion to Blanche, which at another time would have roused her warmest indignation, passing unheeded.

"Yes, I do. He's bent on having you, so take my advice and give in at once. What a fool you are to refuse him, my child! He is out and out the best fellow I know. What do you want? he'll let you do every mortal thing you like."

"Married life is such a miserable thing, Horace."

"So it is, I'll allow, if it's like mother's, but it wouldn't be with Conway. Do you think Blanche and I would be miserable if we were married?" he exclaimed, referring again to what was uppermost in his mind.

"No, because she doesn't feel about it as I do."

"But, Leila, you are making a great mistake in feeling as you do. It's all unnatural somehow; though I'm not good at lecturing, I know you are wrong. It's not fair to judge of all by one."

"I don't. I judge by what I see in general. You're a man, Horace, and naturally, I suppose, you don't think

about it as I do. Why, even Sir George, whom you all hold up to me as a mirror of chivalry and goodness and so on, his wanting me is all selfishness. If he cared for me really and not for himself, he would not persecute me to marry him when he knows I don't want to do it."

"But that is because he likes you—of course he wants to marry you."

"Yes, because he is selfish. If I liked a person I wouldn't torment him to do what he hated."

Colonel Radclyffe felt nonplused. He had no reply to such a style of argument. "You're a rum 'un, Leila, if ever there was one," he remarked sententiously. "You beat me entirely." He looked at her for a minute. "You are as pale as a ghost. If such a selfish monster as a man might make a suggestion to you, I should say you ought to go in and get warm."

"I will. I'm very cold, and my head aches horribly. I knocked it so, Horace, against that beam in the roof," she confessed, laughing a little.

"Serves you right. What business had you there? why didn't you stay in your room, if you didn't want to see him?"

"Because then I must have gone down, and I took fright somehow. Horace, you won't tell mamma, will you?" and she looked pleadingly at him with her gray eyes, laying her hand on his arm.

"No. I'll say nothing about it, never fear. Go in and warm yourself."

"She's downright afraid and no mistake," he muttered to himself as he took out a cigar, while Leila went to her room and set herself to clear her apparel from some of the dust, cobwebs, and white-wash with which it was plentifully bestrown. While so engaged Blanche knocked at her door. "Come in."

"Leila, where have you been? I thought you came up here after your drive, but when I looked for you you had vanished." Miss Radclyffe related her adventures, swearing Blanche to secrecy. That young lady went into fits of laughter. "How intensely absurd! What a state poor Sir George would be in if he had any idea he had been keeping you a prisoner among the bats!"

"Horace has been giving me a lecture about it," said Leila, half laughing. "He says I'm unnatural—of course he thinks it dreadful of me not to want to marry."

"I think you are very hard-hearted, Leila. I did feel so sorry for that poor fellow to-day. He looked so disappointed when you did not come. He waited and waited, wanting to say good-by to you."

"If that had been all I should not have gone away: but I was afraid of the other thing when you said he was going to let Leighton Court. Perhaps I was mistaken, and need not have given myself those two blows, but I'm always in terror when I'm near him."

"I was a fool to tell you he was here. He left touching messages for you, but I sha'n't deliver them, you don't deserve it."

"Yes, yes; tell me what he said."

"No, I sha'n't. You ought to have come and seen him."

"Blanche, when a person trusts you with a message you ought to give it."

"You won't care to hear it."

"That has nothing to do with it. I can tell you every word he said, but that does not justify you in withholding it."

"You can't tell every word he said, nor one half,—he and I had a long conversation. If any misfortune befalls him I shall look on it as your fault."

"What should befall him?" asked Leila rather quickly.

"He may die of boredom listening to those prosy speechifiers in the House of Commons with no wife to console him when he gets home."

"What did he say, Blanche? did he tell mamma he wanted to see me?"

"No; there's where he behaved so splendidly. He never uttered a word to her, but when he was going he said to me, 'Will you tell her how sorry I am not to have seen her, and that, unfortunately for myself, I cannot forget, as she wishes me to do?'"

"Then you see he did want more than just to say good-by. I wish he would forget, Blanche; I wish he would. As a friend I like him, and I know how kind he has been to papa, but I can't marry—I can't, indeed."

Mrs. Radclyffe paid Blanche a visit that night in her bedroom. She had become accustomed now to her aunt's nocturnal perambulations, and they no longer alarmed her as they used when she first went to Deerscourt.

"My dear, I could not sleep without first coming to say a little word to you about dear Leila. I'm so sorry she would not see Sir George to-day." Having thus opened the conversation, Mrs. Radclyffe waited for Blanche to impart some information or offer some comfort.

"So am I, Aunt Mary; but it can't be helped," was the only thing which occurred to Blanche to say.

"He stayed all that time on purpose to see her—don't you think so?"

"Yes, I think he did."

"Can you understand her behaving so to him, after all his kindness to us? It does seem too extraordinary. I'm sure it's not that I keep on forcing him down her throat now, as Horace says I used. I simply never mention his name." Mrs. Radclyffe fully believed this, though the truth was, she talked of Sir George incessantly. "Do you think she will ever be induced to marry him, Blanche?"

"Well, I was beginning to have hopes, but they were rudely dashed to-day, I confess."

"You see, now that Charles is so good and nice, I did hope she would forget all her ideas about marriage being such a miserable thing. She must see how much better he is;—he does everything I tell him, and takes his medicines and all as nicely as possible."

"Dear Aunt Mary!" said Blanche, laughing and kissing her, "and so he ought. Just look how devoted you are to him."

"Ah, my dear, so I always have been, but that hasn't made him any better. God knows I've had a miserable life, but now that he is a little more affectionate to me, and doesn't aggravate me so cruelly. I feel quite happy, and I try my best to be cheerful before Leila, and I'm always telling her how good and nice her father is."

"I doubt if that does any good, Aunt Mary."

"Why she must see by it that I am happier."

"Yes; but you have been married thirty-five years. Nearly half a century of awful misery and constraint, with the prospect of a little peace and happiness or rather freedom from suffering at the end, when your husband can't help himself, isn't a very great inducement to matrimony," said Blanche bitterly.

"But, Blanche dear, God forbid that I should want her to marry Sir George if I thought he would make her miserable. I'm so anxious for it because he is a good man. I know I should have been so happy myself with a little kindness, and when Charles ever was good, I was in such spirits; and I'm sure Leila would be happy with Sir George, and he would be good to her, and not bully her or try to cow her and make her miserable just because she is his wife, as so many men do."

"That's what she is afraid of, and I'm sure I don't wonder at it, when one thinks what married life often is; and you see,

dear Aunt Mary, all the talking in the world won't do away with the feeling, unless she gets to like him really, and then she won't mind trusting herself to him."

"Do you think she ever will get to like him, Blanche?" asked Mrs. Radclyffe anxiously.

"Well, I thought so lately; and presuming on that I advised the wretched Sir George to ask her again, so you may conceive my feelings when she wouldn't show to-day."

Mrs. Radclyffe embraced her in a rapture of delight. "Did you really advise him to propose to her again? how can I thank you enough! and did he say he would? I should die happy if I left my darling Leila safely married to him."

"I conclude he meant to do so; but a man can hardly propose when the object of his affections persistently avoids him."

"Couldn't he write to her, Blanche? I think a letter would have much more effect?"

"And I think it wouldn't; besides, you could scarcely send him a letter suggesting such a proceeding. No; it's no use now—she doesn't care for him enough, or thinks she doesn't, which comes to the same thing."

"What could we do to make her care for him?" exclaimed Mrs. Radclyffe, as if the process could be brought about by machinery.

"Leave her alone, and don't tease her about him."

"My dear, I never utter a word about him," said Mrs. Radclyffe emphatically, and with that she took her leave, while Blanche reflected much on life in general, and her aunt's in particular. She always tried to avoid reflection on Mr. Radclyffe's conduct to his wife, for the disgust and horror it roused in her mind were such that she could never even speak to him for two or three days after letting her mind dwell on it. He then, unconscious to a degree that was pitiable, of the aversion of which he was the object, would inquire what was the matter with her, fear she was not well, and load her with little attentions, so that Blanche, who would have forgiven her worst enemy at the end of a week—(not so much from any active Christian principle as from a certain sense of humor in her disposition, which made her see the ludicrous side of everything, and because it was a bore to go on being angry)—and who, besides, for his wretched wife's sake was willing to be amiable to him, would overcome

her feelings, and they would relapse into their old ways, to his great joy. "Blanche is all right again to-day; she has been uncommonly out of spirits lately," he would remark innocently to his wife, who would secretly vow never to speak about her grievances to her visitor again—a vow she kept religiously, poor soul! till the next time.

CHAPTER XLV.

BLANCHE SEYMOUR returned to London to her mother and sister looking like the shadow of her former happy self. "Her glorious beauty was a fading flower,"—her voice left her, for she had no heart to sing,—the sweet temper which never used to be ruffled, save by a rare passing cloud, like an April sunshiny shower, became changeable. Everything irritated her, even the unspoken sympathy of her mother and Mabel—unspoken, for she would never suffer any questions on the subject of herself, persisting that she was quite happy, and answering Ralph's remarks about her paleness by saying she was getting old, and people always lost their color then.

Horace had brought her up to London; his mother took it as such a matter of course that he should do so, that he could not have avoided it had he wished, which, however, he did not. But there are journeys and journeys, and this was the most painful Blanche had ever taken. Horace sat opposite to her and gave her as many papers to read as if she had just returned from Central Africa.

"Horace, I couldn't read all these in a week," she said smiling.

"I thought you liked the papers," he returned, as if hardly aware of what he was saying. He looked at the sporting news himself, and then held the supplement of the *Times* idly before him, and so they went on till they got near London, Blanche's brain being a whirl of leading articles, fashionable news, gray shirtings, parliamentary news, France, Austria, Italy—all jumbled together in her head in that delightful confusion to which railway traveling is so conducive. The words so danced before her eyes that she abandoned the attempt to read any longer, and sat looking out of the window.

"We shall soon be there now," she observed at last, to break the silence.

"Yes," and he took out his watch; "half an hour more. Are you tired?"

"No; not at all, thanks."

"My father will miss you terribly, Blanche," he said after a minute, looking at her.

"Yes; he seemed to want me to take up my abode at Deerscourt altogether."

"Leila doesn't get on with him, she is so cold; besides, she is afraid of him."

"She gets on better now. His illness has softened him, I think."

"They'll be very lonely without you," he repeated, returning to the same idea.

"You are going back to Deerscourt, are you not?"

"Yes; I shall go back," he answered in a depressed voice, as if it mattered little where he went.

"Horace," she said, rather timidly, "how do you get on with Edythe? you never tell me now."

He looked at her for an instant and then turned away his eyes.

"Pretty well, I think. It's an awful bore;—I shall be glad when it's over."

"She'll be a very good wife, Horace, if she ac—I mean, if you are married."

"Yes; I think she will." His voice sounded as miserable as he looked.

"Horace, you must try to see how good and nice she really is."

"I do," he answered, still looking out of the window.

"I've been afraid, Horace, that you were—that perhaps—if you won't be angry at my saying so—you are looking on it a little too much as a matter of business. I don't know—I may be mistaken—but I should be so sorry if you did—you would be so miserable."

He was silent. "You don't mind my having said so, do you, Horace?"

"No, Blanche, certainly not. It is very kind of you." He spoke in a low voice, still looking away from her. "But it is not as you say—I like her very much; she will suit me exactly, and I think her a good, nice girl."

"She's a high-spirited one, too, and has always had her own way; you won't expect too much of her, or he—he hard on her, will you?" He turned his eyes on her this time.

"No, Blanche, I won't. I'll be very kind to her, if she's all right to me," and then came the man to collect the tickets, and they relapsed into silence.

They went to the Maynards' house in Grosvenor Square. "Come in, Horace, and have some tea."

"No, thank you, I must go, I have so

much to do. I will come and call on Mrs. Seymour and Mabel before I leave town. Good-by, God bless you, Blanche," and squeezing her hand nearly off he turned away.

Mabel rushed down-stairs in a rapture of joy, Mr. Maynard following more leisurely to greet his sister-in-law. "My own darling! here you are! Come upstairs; mamma is in the drawing-room."

"Did you come alone?" inquired Mrs. Seymour anxiously, noting her altered looks, when the first greetings were over.

"No; Horace came with me, but he could not come in. He will call on you and Mabel another day."

The mother and daughter stayed for a month with Mabel, and then took up their abode in a street leading into Portman Square, that being nearer Mabel and the Rivers's than Albany Street, and there week after week Blanche struggled for cheerfulness for her mother's sake. One evening Mrs. Seymour was lying on the sofa and the girl sitting on a low stool by the window, looking up, in the waning light, at the sky—such sky as is to be seen from a London street. Gradually her eyes filled with tears as she sat, her head resting on her hand.

"My darling, what is it?" said her mother, who was watching her. "What is the matter?"

Blanche started. "Nothing, mamma dear; nothing at all."

"I thought you were crying, darling."

"'Tears, idle tears'," said Blanche, half playfully and rousing herself; and then she repeated, to herself almost,—

"Thinking of the days that are no more—that are no more."

"Blanche, you never sing or play now. Go to the piano, my darling."

"Mamma, I can't; don't ask me," she answered, sitting down again suddenly and with a sound of agony in her voice that struck a chill to the mother's heart.

"My own dearest! what is it?" said Mrs. Seymour, going over and kneeling beside her, and drawing her head down on her shoulder.

"Oh, mamma, mamma," cried the girl, as if in sharp pain and trying to suppress a sob which nevertheless forced itself from her, "why doesn't he come and see me sometimes, or write, as he used to do?"

"My darling, my darling," said her mother, clasping her weak, loving arms round her, "I feared this. Why did I ever let you go to Deerscourt?"

"Mamma, sometimes I wish myself I

had never gone, and then again I don't, because I was so happy,—happier than I had ever been before;—happy as I shall never be again—never again," she repeated with inexpressible sadness.

"My child, don't say that—don't, for my sake."

"I must, mamma; it is true."

It was true.

"Where such fairies once have danced no grass does ever grow."

To no one else in the world could Blanche so have spoken but to her mother, not even to Mabel now she was married.

"Mamma dear, don't kneel on the floor,—you will be tired," and she freed herself from her arms.

"Come and sit by me and tell me all about it, dear," said Mrs. Seymour rising.

Blanche arranged the shawl over her on the sofa, and sat down on the floor by her side. "There is nothing to tell, mamma,—not much, at least; and I really am silly to mind about it in one way. Of course we could never have been married," she said simply, "because we neither of us have any money. He spoke very nicely about it one day."

"Spoke to you, dearest? What did he say?"

"He said how miserable it was for people to marry on nothing. He did not say he and I especially, but I knew he meant it."

"How could he dare to offer you such an insult?" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, indignantly. "Had you been flung at his head he could not have said more! He came after you and sought you, not you him!" Excessive anger made her strong again, and she sat up erect, as if she had been eighteen and had never felt feebleness or suffering.

"Mamma, you mistake," said Blanche gently; "he had no intention of offering me an insult—he would not insult me, I'm sure."

"It was an insult to speak such words to you."

"No, mamma, it was not," she said firmly; "not in the way he said them—he never implied that I had been flung at his head—had he done so I should have seen it directly, but he did not. Lie down, mamma, and I will tell you how it was. I dare say it will sound very silly to you when I say that I never thought about being married at all, but it is true, nevertheless; I think I was in a dream all that time—but it was not so with him

—men are different, I suppose—and then, when he spoke to me that day it opened my eyes and I saw things could not go on always in that way. I was very unhappy, I confess—it was at Ryde—but he was right to tell me, and I understood it all; but what I can't understand is why he never comes to see me now as he used, though he has been in London for more than a month, Leila tells me, and why he never writes, though he asked me to be his friend always, and why, all of a sudden, he would hardly speak to me at Leighton Court. I never did anything to vex him really, though one day he was angry because I looked at a book with Mr. Vivian when he wanted me to go out with him."

"He doesn't come because he knows he has behaved very badly," answered her mother. "A man is utterly bad and heartless to win a girl's love and then fling her away when it suits himself."

"Mamma, he is not heartless. He was very sorry—I saw it in his face."

"My child, you may excuse him if you can, but I can't, and I can't excuse myself. Ralph, and Geoffrey, and Charles all warned me, but I would not believe any man could act so basely, and did not heed them. How could I, when I saw his devotion to you?"

"Mamma," after a pause, "do you think it very horrid of me to—think so much of him?—you know what I mean?—because, you see, he never *said* he cared for me; only he was so kind, I could not help liking him and thinking of him," and her voice broke again.

"Blanche, if he never said in words that he liked you, his looks and actions said so every moment he was with you. You would not have been human had you not liked him in return. No one can ever attach the slightest blame to you. Till you came from Deerscourt this time I had no idea that all was not going on well, though Mabel told me about Edythe Conway, but I would not believe it. How can I condemn myself enough for my blind infatuation?"

"Mother, you were not to blame in any way whatever. I suppose a divinity shapes these rough ends for us as well as the smooth ones. It will be all the same forty years hence. What a long thing life seems when one looks forward to it, doesn't it, mamma?"

"Then it is true that he wants to marry Edythe Conway, as Mabel told me?" inquired Mrs. Seymour, not heeding her question.

"Yes, quite true; but I'm afraid she doesn't care for him."

"Of course not; she sees he only wants her money."

"The world is always playing at cross purposes," said the girl laughing, with that faculty she had of looking at things—even those that touched her most nearly—from the outside, and as if she, Blanche Seymour, had nothing to do with them. "Edythe likes Mr. Vivian, and he—well, he doesn't care for her, and poor Horace wants her to be his wife, and so it's all a game of cross questions and crooked answers."

"Does Edythe like Mr. Vivian?"

"Yes, I'm sure she does. She talks so much of him and notices all he says and does, and is so anxious to know what he says to me."

"Edythe tells me he likes you, my darling; could you not try to be happy with him?"

"Never, mamma. My heart is so full of—Horace," she paused before the name, "that there is no room for any one else there, and never will be. I think of him always, all day and all night, and hear his voice. I wish I didn't! Mother, shall I always feel this horrible longing to see him when he won't come?" and her head went down on her knees.

"My poor child! Time will lessen it, and I hope afterwards you may be able to accept some good man's love."

"Never—never. Don't mistake, mother: I'm not going to shut myself up and be miserable, and make you so—that would be selfish and cowardly, but I never can banish that one image sufficiently to make room for another."

"Blanche darling, when you are calmer and see more clearly how basely he has behaved, you will find your feelings towards him insensibly alter."

"Do you recollect what Desdemona said to Emilia and Iago about Othello? 'His unkindness may defeat my life, but never taint my love.' That is my case. I don't justify Horace altogether—I know now he was to blame, but that does not affect my feeling towards him."

"My dear, Shakspeare put that into Desdemona's mouth and it sounds very beautiful, but it is not true. Men attribute such enduring love to women, and, unfortunately, often act as if nothing they can do can kill it, but they are mistaken."

"I don't think so, mamma. Nothing

he could ever do would change my—feeling for Horace," and as she spoke a burning blush dyed her face.

"A woman's pity and long-suffering kindness may remain, dear, but not her love. Love cannot exist without esteem, and no one can esteem unkindness and injustice."

Both sat silent for a long time, and then Blanche said, "Mamma, I'm glad I have had this talk with you. I did not think I could ever have spoken of it even to you; but you won't tell Mabel, or any one, will you?"

"No, darling, certainly not."

"And you must try not to think hardly of him, mamma. He meant no harm,—only I wish he did not seem as if he were angry with me. I should like to have been his friend still, and Edythe's, too."

Mrs. Seymour knew how little possible such friendships are, but she would not say so now, knowing how useless it would be. She passed her hand lovingly over the girl's drooping head, and so they sat in silence in the deepening gloom, till the street lamp alone shed a flickering light into the room.

The entrance of Geoffrey and Emily Rivers disturbed them.

"How dismal you look, sitting in the dark!" exclaimed the latter.

"Aunt Fanny," said Geoffrey, "we've come to steal Blanche from you for a day's expedition to Richmond to-morrow. I'm going to give my schools an *outing*."

"I hope it will be fine," said Emily; "the poor children are all looking forward with such delight to it, and say they hope Miss Seymour will come."

On Blanche's return the next day she found Mr. Vivian had called.

"He seemed dreadfully disappointed at not seeing you, dear," said her mother, "and said he would call again soon."

"I wish he would not; I did all I could to prevent his coming at all. I told him we lived in lodgings in a very unfashionable street, and that I did not go into society."

"But I hope you will go out, Blanche. Mabel is so anxious to take you; it will be a real disappointment to her if you don't."

"Of course I will a little. Mabel is so proud of being my chaperon, I would not deprive her of the pleasure for the world, only I wish Mr. Vivian would see that I don't want him always with me."

CHAPTER XLVI.

It was the height of the London season. The votaries of fashion toiled as laboriously at their pleasures as the wretches on the tread-mill. Rotten Row, the Drive, opera, concert, ball; ball, concert, opera, the Drive, the Row, followed each other in monotonous succession. The roar of carriages deafened the ear and stupefied the brain, till at last the very stones looked as if they wanted rest. Of all the human units who composed this busy, striving, eager world, none enjoyed herself more than Mabel Maynard. She was a most innocently frisky matron, thoroughly appreciating her first married season, all the more, too, from the contrast it presented to the preceding year when she had cultivated cheerfulness under depressing circumstances in Albany Street. Her husband, whose sole desire was to gratify her, had bought a house in Grosvenor Square, where Mrs. Maynard gave dinners, balls, and concerts to her heart's content. No cloud had as yet marred her wedded life. Charles vied with her in attention to her mother and sister, and would willingly have had them to live with him had they consented to do so. Even the one fear she had entertained, viz., that he and Ralph would quarrel, seemed unlikely to be realized. She felt that her lines had fallen to her in pleasant places, and her great desire was to make her sister as happy as she herself was. Very proud was she when, fully conscious of her own loveliness (she could hardly be otherwise with husband, mother, and sister perpetually dwelling on it), she chaperoned Blanche to a ball or concert.

She and her Charlie were together in the drawing-room. "You won't come this evening, then, dearest, with Blanche to the House?"

"No, Charlie; I have already explained to you that I won't be shut up like a wild beast."

"I'm going to speak, you know, dear."

He made the statement with a certain degree of hesitation, awaiting in happy, half-shy expectation the rejoinder it would call forth. Mrs. Maynard closed her violet eyes, thereby anticipating that French artist who painted a picture to prove of how much expression the human countenance may be capable without those organs.

"How I envy the listeners! But I can enjoy the felicity of hearing you at home, my dear, without going down to Westminster. What are you going to speak about?"

"The Malt Tax, dear."

"The Malt Tax! Delightful subject to the feminine mind! And what are you going to say about it?"

"Well—I think it ought to be repealed."

"Quite right, my dear; I agree with you. Then, perhaps, the people would have better beer, and would not beat and kick their wretched wives to death, after the manner of brutal Englishmen, as you allow them to do now. I'm delighted to think you advocate such useful reforms. Have you rehearsed your speech?"

"No, dearest," he answered, laughing benignly; "we don't rehearse our speeches."

"Don't say 'We don't rehearse our speeches' in that patronizing way, as if I knew nothing at all about it. Allow me to tell you, Mr. Maynard, that many great men not only rehearsed their speeches, but learned them by heart. It would be a much better thing if you did, too. Then, perhaps, you would not talk so much nonsense as some of you do now. Suppose you begin—you have to catch the Speaker's eye, haven't you?"

"Yes, dear."

"What does he do when you catch his eye, Charlie? does he wink at you?"

"No, dear, he doesn't do that," said the gentleman, laughing softly, as if much titillated at the idea.

"I should, most assuredly, were I the Speaker."

"That would be unbecoming the dignity of the House, Mabel, and they would depose you."

"Then I should wink at them all in a body. How would they like that? Now, go on, Charlie. I'll be the Speaker. Stop a minute," and she flew out of the room, coming back in a second or two with a gown and wig on. "Now I make a beautiful Speaker. Go on, Charlie, and don't look so supremely surprised!"

Words are powerless to express the intense astonishment of the perplexed Charles at the apparition of his wife in the above-named articles.

"How does the Speaker look? Very stupid, doesn't he?"

"No, he's not stupid. He's a very clever man," returned he solemnly.

"I don't see how that can be. 'Who drives fat oxen must himself be fat'—who listens to stupid men must himself be stupid. Not you, dear, of course,—you are the brilliant exception to the uniform dullness. Now then, Charlie, go on. Sir,

the honorable gentleman whose speech the House has heard with such surprise—you always begin by abusing some one else, don't you? it's the most taking form of oratory, and the only time you ever make an approach to being amusing." Mrs. Maynard's eloquence was cut short by the announcement,—“Mr. Vivian.”

She stood up, hastily pulling off the wig and gown.

“Rehearsing for private theatricals?” inquired the visitor.

“No, not quite that,” she answered, slightly embarrassed. She was a very demure matron in public.

“She looks pretty in a wig, doesn't she?” said her husband, appealing to his guest.

“Extremely so. It makes you look like your sister, Mrs. Maynard.”

“I fully appreciate the compliment coming from you, Mr. Vivian. I expect her here presently. Now, if you really wish to be useful, you would assist us with your advice. I am going to have some charades and *tableaux vivants*, and that sort of thing. Blanche, Edythe Conway, and Emily Rivers are coming to arrange all about it this afternoon, and I feel convinced it would be very good for your mind to help them.”

“I shall be glad to be of use, but such things are not much in my line. I have been very unfortunate lately in never finding Miss Seymour at home when I call.”

“Well, you will see her this afternoon. I expect her every minute.”

“But, you know, dear, Blanche is coming with me,” suggested Mr. Maynard hesitatingly.

“I wouldn't repress her zeal to hear about the Malt Tax for the world; but you are not going to start directly, are you?”

“No; only you won't keep her too long, will you?”

Blanche and Emily, attended by Geoffrey, arrived soon afterwards, and when Edythe came they plunged into endless discussions as to the parts they were to take.

“I had such a rise out of George,” said Edythe. “I proposed that he should be Geraint, and Blanche or Mrs. Rivers Enid.”

“Why a rise?” asked Mabel.

“Because he abhors Geraint, and says he is a brute. You should see his face if any one praises the poem! Besides, suppose Leila heard he personated him, she might think he wanted her to be the Enid to his Geraint.”

“Why you should propose me as Enid I can't conceive,” said Blanche.

“Or me,” said Emily.

“Because you both have a certain Enidish element in you.”

“Indeed I haven't,” returned Blanche quickly. “Had I been Enid I should have galloped away and left Geraint in the lurch, and I being a lighter weight, he could not have caught me up. I should not have borne his brutality patiently.”

“So you may think, Blanche; but I know better.”

“I should never have married Geraint, in the first place, Edythe. I think he is horrid.”

“Why horrid?” asked Mr. Vivian, who was sitting near her, and who paid deferential attention to all her opinions now.

“A man who thought his wife's affections were to be kept by ‘dressing her beautifully’!” exclaimed Blanche contemptuously, and flashing a look at him, as if he had been responsible for Geraint's unknighly conduct.

“I think he is horrid, too,” said Emily, “but mamma says he is not unnatural.”

“He may not be, but he is not a fit character to hold up as a model of knight-hood and chivalry,” said Blanche.

“Chivalry! Stuff!” remarked Miss Conway.

“Don't you approve of chivalry?” asked Geoffrey.

“Never ~~was~~ there a more false and hollow pretence,” Mr. Rivers. It was the salve men applied to their consciences for their tyranny and injustice.”

“Is that your opinion of chivalry, too?” inquired Mr. Vivian of Blanche.

“I think justice is a very much better thing,” she answered in her sweet voice, which somehow now always had a melancholy vibration in it, “but I don't go as far as Edythe. Chivalry was very splendid in its way, and it was good for the men,” she added smiling.

“How do you make that out, Blanche?” asked Geoffrey. “The women were generally supposed to be the gainers by it.”

Blanche shook her head. “We hear of young and beautiful maidens freed from durance, Geoffrey, but how many helpless old women did chivalry save from burning or drowning as witches?”

“Just so,” said Edythe. “Men were chivalrous where their inclinations led them to be so, and no further.”

“Still chivalry paved the way for justice,” said Mabel; “and at any rate, as Blanche says, it humanized the men.”

"Oh, in that way, of course, I allow its merits," said Edythe, "but as a substitute for justice—no."

"Justice is often a stern commodity," said Geoffrey.

"The justice Edythe and I mean is not," said Blanche. "Justice as opposed to injustice. The giving to every human being what is his or her due, not as a favor, but as an inherent right. Chivalry depended too much on individual caprice."

"You don't approve, then, of what is only granted as a favor?" said Mr. Vivian.

"That depends. *You* would not like to enjoy merely on sufferance that to which you have an undoubted right?"

"No; certainly not."

"Well, neither do I. One accepts favors from those one loves. A right ought not to depend on favor."

"Still you would accept a favor on some conditions."

"Certainly; from any one I cared for."

"In fact, in accepting a favor you consider that you are conferring one at the same time," he said smiling. This little *tête-à-tête* was carried on rather as an aside.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mabel, "if we discuss every character we propose to personate in this extremely lengthy fashion, we shall never arrive at any conclusion. Let it be understood, once for all, that we don't become Enids and Geraints because we dress up like them for ten minutes."

"What character do you propose taking?" inquired Mr. Vivian of Blanche.

"I really don't know. I won't be Enid, that's all,—nor Desdemona."

"I saw your sister in a costume when I came, in which you would look charming as Portia."

"Mabel has provided a number of dresses, I believe," returned she, to avoid a discussion.

"Mr. Vivian," asked Mabel, "are you going to make one of my troop? I won't attribute any of Geraint's characteristics to you if you will take his part."

"I should be a most inefficient representative of any one, Mrs. Maynard; but I shall ask permission to assist as a spectator."

"Certainly; *cela va sans dire*; but won't you make one of my *tableau*?"

"I would rather not. You would soon find I should do more harm than good."

"Oh, you have only to stand quite still and look your part."

"That is just where I should fail. I'm

afraid I can only look like that extremely disagreeable personage—myself," and he glanced at Blanche.

"I have been suggesting to your sister to appear as Portia, Mrs. Maynard."

"Capital!" she exclaimed, "and Emily can be Nerissa. We can make a charming *tableau*! Who will be Bassanio?"

"Lady, will you let me be Bassanio?" said Mr. Vivian in a low voice, bending a little nearer Blanche as she sat.

"I would not subject you to anything so disagreeable as you would find standing up to be looked at in a fancy dress. My brother will be Bassanio, if Mabel wishes to have the scene."

"As you please, Lady." He felt disappointed, but not discouraged, Lady Eveleigh's lecture about public appeals being still in his mind. Blanche turned away much embarrassed. She could not misunderstand his meaning.

"Here, Blanche," cried Mabel, "let us see how you will look as Portia," and she put on her the wig and gown which had so astonished Charles, while Blanche stood, blushing and bashful, conscious of Mr. Vivian's gaze.

"Take it off, Mabel; I should make a horrible Portia," she said shyly laughing. "I should never have had courage to face the Court."

"I think you would if you had had a great object in view," said Geoffrey.

"Perhaps; if people had not known I was Portia. At present I feel convinced of the advantages of a retired life."

Mr. Maynard came into the room, and watched the proceedings. He was in a state of supreme fidget for fear Blanche should be kept too long. When the visitors had all departed he said, with much circumlocution and many signs of wonder in his face, "Mabel dear, I know you always have everything, but how did you manage to have those"—indicating the wig and gown—"just at the very moment you wanted them?"

"At the last I spake with my tongue!" cried Mrs. Maynard laughing joyously. "You darling! I have seen that that has been puzzling your dear brain ever since. It's more puzzling than the Malt Tax, isn't it, Charlie? Now, guess three times."

"I never can guess, Mabel, you know, and never attempt to solve one of your riddles."

"Come, try, Charlie. Where do you think I got them?"

"My dear, I can't form an idea. You always have everything just when it is

wanted. I told Sophia to-day how extraordinary it was."

"Oh, Blanche, I wish you had seen his face when I rushed out of the room and came back in this wig!"

"Because she has everything always ready," repeated he in a tone of genuine wonder and delight—looking at his nonpareil jewel the while. His life was one long note of admiration since his marriage. He contemplated every action of his wife, no matter how commonplace, as a *connoisseur* does a favorite picture, from all sides, constantly finding new beauties.

"I wish you had not produced your wig just now," said Blanche.

"Where did you get it, really, Mabel?"

"Cecil Rivers brought it. I thought it might come in usefully."

"I wish you had not," said Blanche again.

CHAPTER XLVII:

"MRS. MAYNARD, I am so glad to find you at home. I was afraid you would be out, it is such a chance ever finding people of an afternoon. How do you do, Edythe? it is an unexpected pleasure to find you here."

The speaker was Lady Glennorth. She was a small, fairy-like creature, giving the idea that her dress was composed entirely of gauzy, floating ribbons, like Ariel's, yet she was never untidy-looking. Her face was very beautiful, though it had lost the radiant bloom of girlhood. She spoke in a gentle deprecating way, as if entreating the pity of all around her, and this naturally—not from affectation, though no human being stood less in need of compassion or had less idea of claiming it. She was one of those unspoilable mortals who have been spoiled from their cradles upwards, yet are none the worse for it.

"I have left cards for my ball," she said, after the usual formalities had been gone through. "I hope you will be able to come."

"Thanks, Lady Glennorth; I shall make a point of doing so."

"And your sister? you will bring her? I called on her, but she was out."

"Yes; she is gone with Charlie to see the pictures."

"I hope nothing will prevent her coming. Glennorth and I feel so indebted to her, Mrs. Maynard, for having subdued Percy's obdurate heart."

"It was a most unpremeditated conquest," said Mabel smiling.

"All the more complete for that very reason. We are so infinitely amused watching him in the new character in which he has come out. He is so cool about it all! Having raved against women all his life, he does not hesitate now to lay himself openly at Miss Seymour's feet. It would be delicious to chaff him, only we are afraid to venture. We are so anxious he should marry."

"I don't think Blanche has any idea she is disposed of in this way," said Mabel, looking at Edythe. It was pleasant to Miss Conway to hear the only man she had ever cared for thus told off to another.

"I am not taking the liberty of disposing of your sister, Mrs. Maynard; but her having taught Percy to appreciate a woman is a great point for us. You don't know," she went on more gravely, "how really good and nice he is, in spite of his sarcastic manner and apparent selfishness. Except my husband, I know of no one who is capable of so much real kindness and generosity."

"I am sure of that," said Mabel.

"Lord Glennorth and I are so delighted at the thought even of having Miss Seymour for a sister! We wish it so much, that we hardly venture to speak about it! She might make anything of him, and he would be the truest and best of husbands."

"Lady Glennorth, there is nothing would give us all greater happiness than such a marriage for my sister, but you are aware that these are things with which it does not do to interfere."

"Of course not; I always tell Glen so. He and Percy had such a miserable bringing up," she went on, eager to account for Mr. Vivian's asperities, "deprived of all love and affection. Except Edythe's poor mother, they never had a woman to care for them or to take the least interest in them."

"What *did* they do for some one to throw the blame of their mistakes on!" exclaimed Edythe.

Lady Glennorth laughed. "I need hardly say Glen has made up for the want since. He blames me for things that took place before I knew him. Mrs. Maynard, you will meet a cousin of mine at the ball, and if you have any male adversary on whom you wish to be avenged, you may bring him and we'll make up a match. I can't wish a man a worse fate than to be married to her."

"Who is this, Nina?" asked Edythe.

"Polly Thomas."

"What a truly appalling name!" exclaimed Mabel.

"Not nearly so much so as the person, I assure you; but her real name is Tryphena."

"She has a sister Tryphosa, of course," cried both her hearers.

"She had, but she is dead. They were twins. Their mother was vehemently evangelical, and called them Tryphena and Tryphosa, hoping they 'would labor much in the Lord.' Tryphosa died before her labors were well begun; in fact, I believe, before she had accomplished the work of teething, but Tryphena remains, a testimony to Welsh orthodoxy. Her old uncle never could remember her name; so after calling her Ceres and Cynthia and Juno and various other heathen divinities, he settled down into Polly, as more consonant to the vernacular. She has been an heiress *in prospectu* all her life, and is now one in reality, her uncle being lately dead. Her possessions in Wales are as startling as herself."

"What is she like? is she as ugly as the proverbial heiress?" inquired Edythe, who was tenacious on the subject of heiresses.

"She thinks herself a beauty,—an opinion unshared, as far as I can discover, by her friends. She also thinks herself clever, and I suppose she is so in a way, though it's a very disagreeable one,—and she would pick a quarrel with an angel."

"Why do you ask such a misfortune to your house?"

"Glen says I ought. She acts like a moral blister on me. I don't get over her for weeks; but I sacrifice to duty, and Glen, after making me ask her, basely dines out or goes to the House of Lords or does some other stupid thing while she is with us, so that I have to bear the whole brunt myself!"

"How like a man!" said both the listeners.

"Base of him, isn't it? but you wouldn't wonder if you could see her. She generally wears pea-green and pink ribbons, and she eats voraciously. Oh!" said Lady Glennorth, throwing up her small head and elevating her nose and lip with an air of the most dainty disgust, "I shudder when I think of dinner in her company. I always say one, two, three and away, before I go into the dining-room. *Elle fait du bruit affreux en mangeant*, and will consume quantities of meat so underdone that even a man would look twice at it."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Mabel and Edythe, rolling the r's in the adjective to a high pitch and vieing with each other in the hideousness of the grimaces they made.

"She eats onions, too, when she can get them!" said Lady Glennorth, as if human depravity could go no further.

"How intensely objectionable!" said Mabel; "but has she no good qualities at all?"

"That's the worst of her!" returned Lady Glennorth, shaking her head in a despairing way. "She has so many that one feels one ought to respect. She is sincerely religious and—disagreeable. She does untold good to the poor, visits them herself, and is like another woman in a cottage talking to a sick child; and her kind-heartedness is unbounded. Perhaps if one had no nerves one might appreciate her as she deserves, but constituted as I am, she drives me almost insane. I defy you to make the simplest statement on any subject, no matter how trivial, that she won't contradict."

"Why has she never married?" asked Edythe.

Lady Glennorth shrugged her shoulders. "Man is her delight, and she goes in for the superiority of the male sex to a wonderful degree, but, in spite of that, no man has hitherto delighted in her. Perhaps now that she has become a gilded pill some one, with the imminent fear of Whitecross Street before him, may be found bold enough to swallow her. I must say I should feel very little respect for any man who did."

Lord Glennorth and Sir George Conway were announced.

"I met Mr. Maynard and Miss Seymour going down Bond Street," said the latter to Mabel.

"Going down! How odd! Then Charlie must have forgotten the tickets at Mitchell's."

"They said something about tickets."

The pair appeared at that moment, and were greeted with "Have you got the tickets?"

"No, dear; there were none left."

"How tiresome! Mitchell said he had some this morning. You have only just been, I conclude?"

"How did you know that?" said her husband, looking convicted.

"Oh! of course you forgot."

"He not only forgot, Mabel," said Blanche, "but said it was my fault, though I had not heard a word about them. Not having his wife there to

blame, he naturally blamed the nearest of kin."

"Oh, Charlie, true son of Adam! how was it Blanche's fault?"

"I thought she knew about them; besides, she talked, so that I forgot all about them."

"How I wish I had told you, Blanche! but it was a surprise for you. It is the last night of *Don Giovanni*, and I thought you would like to go, but I would not take the tickets till I knew whether Charlie was disengaged; and now, see how he rewards my consideration!"

"I have been telling Mrs. Maynard about Polly Thomas," said Lady Glennorth to her husband, "and how well you help me to entertain her."

"You will see some novel combinations of color, Mrs. Maynard," said he, "when you make her acquaintance, and hear some strong opinions on political and religious subjects."

"All delivered in a loud, squeaky tone, for I forgot to say that to her other attractions she adds *the* most dreadful voice!" said Lady Glennorth.

"That must be the lady I once took in to dinner at your house, Lady Glennorth," said Sir George.

"Yes; in a yellow dress, and her head looking like an inebriated door-mat."

"Now, Nina, if I had said that, you would have scolded me for being ill-natured," said Lord Glennorth. "I'll back a woman to say severe things."

"And I'll back a man to draw attention to them! Mrs. Maynard, Polly Thomas thinks it her mission to set the example of not wearing frizettes or anything of that sort in the hair;—she says men don't approve of it—so the docile creature goes about with hers *au naturel*, that is, when the weather is fine, in fuzzy, untidy curls, right up to the top of her head; when it rains, as she eschews curling-tongs as an outrage on nature, her locks hang in pure, pristine beauty down her back."

"How nasty!" said Mabel.

"That's nature. No sham or delusion about it! Frizettes and false hair denote a false mind. Eve wore no frizettes."

"Nor did she trouble herself about a tooth-brush," said Edythe, "or many other little trifles to which we attach some importance."

That evening, as Mr. and Mrs. Maynard were at dinner in company with Mrs. Seymour, Blanche, and Ralph, there came a loud peal at the bell.

"Who can that be?" exclaimed Mabel.

"Mr. Vivian," announced the butler.

"Mrs. Maynard, I apologize for appearing so late, but Nina told me you had been unable to get stalls for the opera. I have been lucky enough to get a box for you. Miss Seymour wished to hear *Don Giovanni*, did she not?"

"How kind of you! and how clever! How did you manage it?"

"I contrived to effect an exchange with a friend, to whom one opera is about the same as another."

"You are like the prince in the fairy story."

"Sit down and have some dinner," said Mr. Maynard.

"Thank you, no—I'm not dressed. I hoped to have got here earlier, but could not manage it."

"Never mind your dress. Sit down. The ladies will excuse you."

Percy glanced at Blanche, who sat with a face burning from the consciousness that all this was done for her, and that a return would be expected which she could not give. It is not pleasant to feel that a call will be made on you which must inevitably find you bankrupt.

"You must come with us, Mr. Vivian, and enjoy *Don Giovanni* too," said Mabel.

Again his eyes sought Blanche, but she was intently studying the Maynard crest on her plate. A chair was placed for him between her and Mabel. "How do you do, Miss Seymour?" he said, offering his hand before he sat down. She took it with embarrassment.

"It is so kind of you to have taken all this trouble in our behalf."

"In yours, Lady," he said in a low voice. Then to Mabel. "If you really mean me to come with you, I will go home and dress and rejoin you."

"Mabel dear, what can I do?" exclaimed Blanche in a voice between laughing and crying as they went up-stairs. "I can feel for Leila now about Sir George."

"He would make you so happy, Blanche."

"No he wouldn't, because I never could be happy with him."

He sat behind her in the box, his elbow resting on her chair, looking pleased and happy, while she thought of the last time she had heard *Don Giovanni*; when another arm rested on her chair, and a sweeping black moustache almost touched her ear, as the voice she loved best in the world whispered uncritical criticisms on the *prima donna*, the fascinating reprobate who gives his name to the piece, the musicians, and the audience. She had longed

to see and hear it all again, and now she longed equally for it to be over.

"In wrath he flew beyond the sea,
Nor ever hath come back to me,"

she repeated inaudibly.

"And now remains but the long sleep
When I shall neither watch nor weep."

Percy's presence irritated her almost beyond endurance. What right had he to put his arm on her chair, and bend over with clever discriminating remarks on the performance, as if he had been writing a musical critique, and dispelling all her illusions?

"He bores me to death, Mabel," she exclaimed in exasperation afterwards. "I hate a man who lays down the law and tells me what to admire. I know as well as he does; and if I don't, I prefer my ignorance to his instruction. If I want to improve my mind, I can read for myself. He torments me to look at pictures with him, and talks to me like a peripatetic Art-dictionary. I detest technical jargon, and can study K  gler at home."

"You used to be amused at him," ventured Mabel, deprecatingly.

"So I was, when he was only cynical and satirical. Now that he is didactic he is insufferable!" And she thought of Horace's natural, unpretending, unartistic criticisms. "Is that supposed to be a good picture, Blanche? I don't know anything about Art, but a soldier would not stand in that way to fire. See, he could not possibly hit the enemy if he did."

Mr. Vivian had no chance. His every look and word were contrasted with those of the man who had touched her imagination as well as her heart. Percy had not the power of doing either.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE morning of Lady Glennorth's ball Blanche was walking in Rotten Row with her sister when Percy Vivian came up. He did not see her the first moment—he was short-sighted.—"Is Miss Seymour here, Mrs. Maynard?" he asked, but almost as he said the words he became aware of her presence. "How do you do? I am fortunate to have met you!"

"This is an unusual place to see you, Mr. Vivian. What brings you here?"

Mabel and Charles had walked on a little in advance.

"Shall I tell you really?"

"I beg your pardon. I had no intention of asking an impertinent question. It was only because you always spoke of the Row as the place where fools most do congregate."

"Quite true; but I had an object in coming to-day. Shall I tell you what it was?"

"That is as you please."

"I came to see you."

"My being here to-day is a mere chance. I don't often come."

"I met George Conway, who told me he had seen you. Where do you generally walk?"

"I generally go out marketing with my mother's maid. I am getting quite *au fait* of the value of potatoes and peas."

"Will you stop here a moment? I want you to look at Nina's horse."

"What a beauty! I never saw him before. He is new, is he not?"

"Yes; she has only ridden him twice. Do you admire him?"

"Oh, I should think so!" she exclaimed with the enthusiasm of a real lover of riding. "What a beautiful head!"

Lady Glennorth cantered up to where they stood, looking like a small, exquisite, feminine Amazon.

"Lady Glennorth, I have been admiring your horse! I don't think I ever saw so perfect a creature."

"He is not my property. He is Percy's—he has lent him to me."

Blanche measured the Hercules beside her with her eye for a minute, but kept her thoughts to herself. He was watching her face.

"You think I ought to be prosecuted by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for riding him, don't you?" he said, smiling.

"He does not look quite up to your weight, I should say, certainly."

Lady Glennorth left them, and they stood looking at her for a time.

"How beautifully she rides!" said Blanche.

"I am glad you approve of the horse. I was anxious you should see him; I got him for you."

"For me, Mr. Vivian? Impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"I could not accept such a gift," looking inexpressibly embarrassed. "I am deeply grateful to you, but believe me, it is out of the question. I am very sorry you did this."

He looked surprised.

"Why should you be sorry? it has given me great pleasure, which will be increased if you will accept him."

"Mr. Vivian, one only accepts such presents from relations."

"You must make an exception in my favor, Lady; and if you will ride him and let me accompany you sometimes, I will overcome even my objection to Rotten Row for your sake." He said it as if the objection were a very real one, but his countenance was softened, as on the day when he rescued her from the gypsies.

The blood rushed to her face, and then back again to her heart. It was absolute suffering to her to give pain to another, to a man especially, but she could not take his gifts and reject himself. He saw her distress without understanding its cause.

"I am unlucky," he said, some-annoyance in his voice; "I displease you when I mean only to gratify you. Forgive my awkwardness; I am inexperienced in such matters, but I am anxious to learn how to deserve your favor."

"Indeed, Mr. Vivian," she began nervously.

"Let me beg you to say, to think no more about it now."

"I must," she persisted resolutely. "I cannot accept your present."

"Say you forgive me for having distressed you, as I see I have, and I bow to your decision," he answered gravely.

"There is nothing to forgive," she said, meeting his eyes with her own, which were losing their laughing look, and growing daily more thoughtful. "I feel as if I ought to ask your forgiveness for declining your—your kindness; but I cannot do otherwise than I have done."

"Another time, Percy, I hope you will take my advice," said Lady Glennorth when he reported his success. "I told you she would not take the horse."

Blanche was dressed for the ball. She had been depressed and out of spirits all day, but a sudden, capricious reaction came over her in the evening, and she entered Lady Glennorth's rooms looking flushed and bright, with the old provocative smile, which was Horace's delight, on her lips, rendered the more attractive from being mingled with the thoughtful look her face was assuming latterly.

Mr. Vivian was standing near the door, and came forward the moment she had greeted his sister-in-law. His eye rested with satisfaction on the graceful, lithe

figure, and on the thorough-bred, gracious countenance. His manner was so genial that it was difficult to believe he was the same individual whose self-sufficiency had irritated and amused her equally at the Winterton ball.

Blanche danced for the sake of dancing,—all young creatures love motion,—and she thoroughly appreciated a good partner, one who could support her without flinging her round as if she had been a bag of oats, as some men have a way of doing, but who did not, on the other hand, let her hang on to his shoulder as though she were a burden he was anxious to get rid of. Now, Percy Vivian had many good qualities, but excellence in dancing was not one of them. He was not a good partner in a *valse*. He jerked and twisted, and fell foul of his neighbors, and tore his companion's dress in a way trying alike to the nerves and temper. His Terpsichorean performances had the effect of gradually ranging the main body of dancers in an admiring circle round the room, so that he and the luckless creature who enjoyed the perilous honor of his support executed a *pas seul* to the exquisite delight of the beholders. But he would go on unheedingly. He asked a lady to dance—what was it to him whether other people stood still or not? And his arm once round her waist, like an iron band, his victim found escape impossible till breath failed her tormentor.

Blanche looked forward with dread to what she would have to undergo. Life would be endurable were it not for its pleasures. The social tortures of a highly-civilized state of society are numerous, and waltzing with an awkward, clumsy Hercules is one of the most exquisite. She had undergone one round dance with him, to the imminent peril of her dress—he did put his foot through her flounce, but apologized so touchingly that she had to assure him she rather liked having those appendages torn than otherwise—and she was thankful that the performance terminated without their having rolled on the floor in company.

This exciting style of exercise, and extreme, utter, inexpressible wonder at Miss Polly—properly Tryphena—Thomas kept Miss Seymour in such spirits that none could have imagined that grief for the defection of her impecunious lover was feeding on her damask cheek. Miss Tryphena's dress and whole appearance were abnormal. She had once had a color, but it bore at this period as much trace of the freshness of the bonnie red

rose as do the petals of that queen of flowers when, with all their kindly juices well dried out, they are destined, in connection with allspice and basalt, for the concoction of a vile compound denominated *pot-pourri*; yet on the strength of this traditional bloom, she always arrayed herself in apple or pea-green with trimmings to match; that is, with just that variation of shade which tortures the eye as discords do the ear. To-night, however, the trimmings were—amber, she called them, her enemies said yellow. It was a time of political excitement. Miss Thomas was a high Tory, and orange was the orthodox badge in her ancestral county. Her arms were heavily weighted with gold, but her head bore away the palm of originality. It was fearfully and wonderfully got up. Though somewhat nondescript in color, the hair was not naturally bad had it been kept within decent bounds; but locks tinged with gray and getting rather coarse, as gray hair is apt to do, falling in Nature's negligence round the shoulders, those shoulders given to turning very red in the act of dancing, as, indeed, well they might, having such a weight to bear,—the shorter hairs frizzling and curling to the crown of her head, imparted to Miss Thomas a rather Mænad-like appearance. Then she danced in spectacles. Far be it from her to use such a fast, flirting, unnatural thing as an eye-glass! Like Nina Glennorth and Blanche, who took the opportunity, when they wanted to inspect a man, of peeping at him through it when they thought he was not looking, and who then, on being detected, laughed and blushed! All simple flirtation! God had made her short-sighted, and she would openly and honestly supply the deficiency. Had one of Miss Thomas's friends said, "God gave me no hair, and I honestly supply the deficiency," she would have pronounced it blasphemous.

"I pray of you, Blanche, to look at Tryphena!" said Edythe.

"Oh, don't, Edythe," implored Blanche; "she will be my death."

"If she dances with Percy, and he falls, as he is very likely to do, and those spectacles are knocked into her eyes, I'm sure I don't know what she will do!" remarked Lady Glennorth in her sweet, deprecating voice.

Mr. Vivian had danced with Miss Thomas, and had neither fallen himself nor let her fall. He did his duty, and then went up to Blanche.

"I am quite aware, Miss Seymour, that

you are looking forward with dread to this next dance," and he smiled. She repudiated the charge, coloring at the same time, from the conviction of its truth, as she took his arm. "You like a good dancer, and I am a very bad one."

"I don't think I'm so very particular as you say about the performances of my partners."

"I know I dance execrably, nevertheless I am going to be selfish enough to claim your promise, but I won't ask you to waltz any more with me; and as I see you don't care for quadrilles, shall we go and look at the pictures I spoke to you about while they get through this one?"

"Oh, not at all," she said in alarm. "I like quadrilles very much, and you are mistaken as to my opinion of your dancing."

He shook his head, reminding her of the bear who wished to be playful.

"You could not be guilty of deception if you tried. Your face is a perfect mirror of your mind, and your opinion of my dancing powers is plainly expressed there."

He was leading her away;—she felt as if she were being taken to execution.

"I have always wondered why you learned to dance," she remarked. "You must always have hated it."

"I do it so badly? Well, I suppose we do hate what we do badly in general, but I like dancing with you, though I can understand your not finding the process so agreeable. My guardian made me learn; but I always felt like a bear on his hind legs."

They were in Lord Glennorth's private room, which was lighted up. The sound of the music came softened.

"How nice and cool it is here!" said Blanche.

He showed her the curiosities of the place,—rare old prints, books, geological specimens, pipes, walking-sticks,—all the treasures a man likes to collect round him. She listened courteously to all he said, made suitable replies, admired everything, and longed to be back dancing. He was so happy, he felt like one in a half-sleep, who is afraid to move for fear of dispelling a bright illusion. A sudden fear that she would decline his offer seized him. By grasping at the whole he might lose that which he already possessed.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who fears to put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all."

He did not think his deserts small. Hu-

mility is not the characteristic of such men as he, but he did fear his fate very much, as every one who is worth any thing fears to lose what they have hoped and striven for.

A waltz which would have made a behemoth dance struck up—the girl's satin-shod feet moved as if in unison with it.

"Shall we go back now, Mr. Vivian?"

He had brought her there to ask her to be his wife. He could not let her go, his purpose unfulfilled. He came up to her suddenly, and took her hand in both his, his harsh, proud face softened inexpressibly.

"Lady, you would not accept a gift from me this morning; perhaps you were right—I honor your motive—will you give me a gift instead—yourself?"

She tried to withdraw her hand. "Oh, I am so sorry! I hoped you would not—it can never be," she said hastily, nervously. "Let my hand go, Mr. Vivian!"

The blood retreated from his face. "Why cannot it be?" he asked, not heeding her last request.

"Because—because—I cannot, indeed."

"Why not?" he repeated passionately, tightening his grasp of her hand till she had to bite her lips from the pain. "Give me a reason. Why did you teach me to love you? to look on you as a holy thing, almost too sacred to be human, if it cannot be? Did you want to boast of a triumph over the man who had never bowed to a woman's influence?" he ended bitterly.

"Mr. Vivian, release my hand!" she said, the eloquent blood rushing to her face, which had before been colorless as snow.

"Not till you give me an answer," he exclaimed, passion and disappointment almost rendering him unconscious of what he was doing. The hitherto calm, impassive nature was stirred to its profoundest depths—depths of which he was himself unconscious. He felt appalled at the cold despair which struck a chill to his heart at her words.

At his refusal to free her her eyes flashed. "You don't know what you are saying. Do you think you can frighten me into accepting your love?"

"I am mad, I think," he muttered, releasing her. "I apologize, Lady; but you cannot know what I suffer,—you never felt despair."

Blanche's anger melted out of her face, giving place to extremest pity. "Mr. Vivian, I am truly, deeply sorry for this," she said with touching gentle dignity, retreating at the same time to the other

side of the table, "but you wrong me in saying I sought to win your love or to triumph over you. I never did either; and as soon as I became at all aware of your—of the feelings with which you honored me, I did all I could to show you I could not return them."

He had folded his arms across his breast as if to keep down the temptation to take her hand again, and stood opposite her.

"I spoke in madness when I said that. I withdraw it, and beg your forgiveness. You did not try to win my love, I well know, but you have done so. What can I do to win yours? I am not a man apt to sue or ask for favors, but I beg you to be my wife. You who first taught me what a perfect thing a woman can be, can tell me what to do to win you."

"Mr. Vivian, what can I say? I honor, I esteem you, but I cannot do more, and I would not wrong you by becoming your wife with such feelings only, nor could you wish it, I am sure."

"But can't you love me?" he pleaded. "You take pleasure in my society. I cannot have misread your face."

"As a friend I do, but you want more than friendship."

"But you do not dislike me. You say you esteem me—I am content with that," he said eagerly.

"No, Mr. Vivian," she answered, while her brow, neck, and shoulders crimsoned painfully; "my love is the only thing I have to give, and without it I will never be any one's wife. It can never be yours—never!"

"Then must I give up all hope of the only woman I ever loved?" he cried in a voice that rung in her ears long enough after. "Think what you are doing. You don't know to what misery you are condemning me—if you did, pity would teach you to love me."

Did she not know? Had she not sounded all the depths of loving and losing? But her woman nature made her wrap her misery up in her own heart, as Cæsar wrapped his mantle round him, while his forced him to make loud moan and call on all the gods to help him.

"You are sending me back to the hard, loveless, selfish existence from which your influence was rescuing me. God did not gift you with power and beauty that you might call forces into action merely to leave them useless, like the foolish magician who raised a spirit he could not control. Be my wife, and let me lavish on you the love you have called into exist-

ence; I am content with the return you can make." He unfolded his arms and came towards her.

"Stay where you are!" she exclaimed nervously, moving away farther. "Do you want me to perjure myself in God's sight?"

He sat down suddenly, and putting his arms on the table, buried his face in them.

Through all his pleading her allegiance never once wavered, though she knew she was rejecting a man infinitely nobler and better than the one in whose keeping her heart was. But what could she do? Were our likes and dislikes in our own hands, she would have been much to blame, but the subtle affinities which draw human beings to each other are no more under their command than the color of their hair or eyes. Her allegiance did not waver, but his grief and disappointment distressed her infinitely. She stood, hardly knowing whether to go or stay, while the distant music came softened like the faint memory of a dream. At this moment her every-day life seemed a far-off, intangible thing. Reality was summed up in the despairing figure before her, whom she knew not how to comfort unless she took on herself to act a life-long lie. She felt afraid to go near him, but suddenly, as if ashamed of herself, she went round and laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. He started at the light touch, and looking up, saw her standing, her sweet, dark eyes full of tears.

"Mr. Vivian, believe me I am grieved to cause you so much pain. I would do what you wish if I could; but the love you ask for is not mine to give. I gave it to another long ago. I ought not, perhaps, to say this to you, but it is to show you how little I can help either myself or you."

"Are you engaged, then?" he asked without rising.

"No, nor shall I ever marry. I am putting in your hands the secret a woman holds most dear, but I know it is safe in your honorable keeping, and it is to show you that I have not lightly declined the offer you have made me. I wish I could accept it. I should be happier as your wife than I am ever likely to be as it is!" And a certain melancholy made her voice inexpressibly touching.

He started up, hope in his eyes. She saw it, and hastened to extinguish it.

"Mr. Vivian, I have trusted you. Do not plead any more for what you see I have not to give: but as you say I have

been the means of—of changing you, in some respects, will you let the memory of our friendship keep you from falling back into—into your old opinions?" She concluded hastily, stumbling for suitable words. He sat down again.

"You could have done what you would with me. Without you I cannot answer for myself," he replied bitterly.

"Do not say that. Good does not depend on individuals;—besides, some day I hope you will have a wife who will give you the love I cannot."

"You propose that to me," he exclaimed fiercely, "though you are unchangeable yourself! Do you, then, take me for such a weak-fibred thing that I can change about with every veering wind? I will have you for my wife or no one. I will wait for you as long as you like." He started up and began striding about the room. "I am no impatient boy, only don't deprive me of all hope of winning the only thing I cared to live for."

He stopped his walk close to her, and seized her hand again.

"I thought you were more generous," she said in a low voice. "Take me to my sister; or must I go alone?"

He turned away with a fierce, despairing gesture, flinging her hand violently from him. She went to the door, but her trembling fingers refused to open it.

"I'll do it," said a broken, changed voice beside her, and he led the way to the ball-room.

"Mabel, I should like to go home," she whispered.

CHAPTER XLIX.

COLONEL RADCLYFFE had proposed to Miss Conway and had been rejected, as he very well deserved to be.

"Nice chance of happiness I should have had with a man who could behave as he has to poor Blanche Seymour," she exclaimed indignantly to her brother. "Insulting me by his offers when the only love he ever had to give is hers!"

"And she can sacrifice herself to a fortune-hunting snob like that!" said Mr. Vivian to himself, flinging the end of his cigar away viciously. He knew well enough who his rival was.

"It is easy to be good on five thousand pounds a year," observed the astute Becky.

Had Mr. Vivian been the younger son of an ill-conditioned father, instead of the presumptive heir to a peerage, with four thousand pounds a year of his own to spend in the mean time, would he have acted differently? He might; probably he would; yet the number of those who can justly throw stones is very small.

After his rejection Horace was anxious to see Blanche. He longed for her sympathy. While there was any chance of winning Edythe he avoided her, but now he called twice on her. She was out on both occasions, and when he came a third time her mother wanted her not to see him.

"Why not, mamma? he is my friend."

And she went down and saw him. He left in better spirits than he had come, and she went on her way rejoicing that she had been of use to him.

Shortly after his departure Mabel came in.

"I saw Horace Radclyffe as I came along, Blanche. Has he been here?"

"Yes; he has not been gone very long."

"I felt so disgusted with him, I could hardly bring myself to bow to him."

"Why, Mabel?"

"A nice sort of man! Not content with being a fortune-hunter himself, he tries to make his servant so too. Nature having deprived him of a heart, he thinks she has been equally niggardly to other people."

"I don't understand, dear," said Blanche a little wearily.

"I don't wonder at it! I never knew anything so cruel in my life! Green tells me [Green was Mrs. Maynard's maid] that he has been doing all he can to persuade Davis to throw poor Jane over and marry a rich widow down at Winterton—some old woman who keeps a public-house."

"I simply don't believe it!" cried Blanche, her face flushing indignantly.

"He would not do such a wicked thing!"

"He has, though; and only that Davis is twice the man his heartless, fortune-hunting master is, poor Jane might fold up all her blue ribbons and wear the willow."

"How could Green know?"

"Jane told her, of course." Mrs. Maynard proceeded to pour forth several remarks of anything but a laudatory nature on Colonel Radclyffe's character.

"Mabel, you could hardly speak more strongly if he was proved to be the greatest criminal, and you are condemning him on hearsay."

"For my part, I think planting thorns on their pillows,

And leaving poor maidens to weep and wear willows, Are not to be classed among mere peccadilloes,"

repeated Mabel; "you will find what I have told you is true enough."

When Blanche went up to dress she was speedily aware that something unusual had occurred to disturb her waiting-maid's composure. Her face was red, her eyes unusually bright, her lips compressed, as if to retain a mighty secret. Being nervous as well as large and awkward, she knocked everything down.

"Jane, what is the matter? You will frighten mamma to death with all that noise," exclaimed Miss Seymour at length, as the drawer of the wardrobe came clattering down, Miss Hedges having inadvertently drawn it out too far.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Blanche; I be that nervous this evening, I don't know scarcely what I'm a-doin';" and leaving the drawer and its contents on the floor, she burst into tears.

"What is it, Jane?" said Blanche, rising from her dressing-table. "Has anything happened? don't cry."

"Oh, Miss Blanche!" sobbed Jane, scrubbing her face with her apron.

Blanche gave her some water. "Sit down, Jane, and tell me what it is."

"It's the Colonel, miss, as have been a advisin' o' Davis not to marry me."

"Nonsense, Jane!" exclaimed Blanche, her heart suddenly feeling like a stone.

"Who told you that?"

"Davis, Miss Blanche; he told me."

"Then is your engagement broken off?"

"No, miss. Davis says he couldn't do no such wicked thing as break a poor girl's heart. But don't you think, miss, as the Colonel ought to be ashamed o' himself a givin' such advice to a young man? It's a widow, Miss Blanche, as have a lot o' money and keeps a public at Winterton. The Colonel keeps a tellin' Davis he ought to marry her."

"Oh, Jane, that is only chaff, and Davis tells you to tease you."

"No it ain't, miss. The Colonel have told Davis over and over again as he's a fool to marry me;—that he could have Mrs. Fiddey—it's that public at the corner near the station, you know, miss—for the asking; and she have a good business, and he says as Davis would be a precious sight better off than married to Jane, who will have a house full of children.' Them's his very words, Miss Blanche," concluded Jane, reddening furiously and looking intensely outraged.

"It's very, very horrible of him if it's

true!" said Blanche, looking white and standing quite still; "but, Jane, it must be a mistake."

"No mistake, Miss Blanche!" and she began to cry again.

"Don't cry, Jane. Davis is not going to take Colonel Radclyffe's advice, so there is no harm done to you."

"No, miss; Davis won't take his advice," she said proudly, bridling up. "He says he feels as if every bit o' the widow's food would choke him! He do! He's a good young man is Davis, Miss Blanche. Not but as I told him I didn't want to be no man's wife as didn't want me. I told him, I says, 'Marry Mrs. Fiddey, if you have a mind.'"

"And what did he say?"

"Oh, Miss Blanche, how can I tell what he said?" returned Miss Hedges, blushing furiously, and again having recourse to her apron.

"Well, Jane, it's all right, you see; so why need you cry?"

"I seems as if I couldn't help it, Miss Blanche. I told Davis to marry Mrs. Fiddey if he liked, but if he does I shall just die. I couldn't live nohow without him!" exclaimed the girl passionately, fixing her blue eyes with a set look on Blanche's face. "You don't think as the Colonel, he'll persuade Davis yet, do you, miss?" she went on, her breath coming thick.

Davis was "a good young man," but even good young men may not safely be trusted with widows with cash in hand. They are dangerous rivals to portionless maidens.

"Of course not. It's all a mistake, I'm sure. But the best thing is for you to be married at once, and then, you know, you can look after him yourself and keep him out of Mrs. Fiddey's way."

Blanche's toilet proceeded in silence for some time, then Jane remarked, "That's a nice gentleman, that Mr. Vivian is, Miss Blanche. A poor girl like me often sees more what a gentleman really is nor a lady like you! You see, miss, they are not so partick'lar like before us as they are before you. They puts on their best manners for you, miss."

The connection between Mr. Vivian and Miss Jane's private affairs was not at first sight very apparent, but she knew well enough what she was about, and wished to convey a delicate warning to her mistress against Colonel Radclyffe, whose conduct respecting the young lady gave rise to diatribes in the room and hall which, had he been at all aware of them, would have considerably astonished him.

"Mr. Robins, Mr. Vivian's gentleman," proceeded Jane, "says as there is no kinder gentleman livin' than his master, and he don't never swear, neither,—leastways, not often. The Colonel, he swear that hawful when he's angry, Miss Blanche, as Davis says it 'ould make your hair stand right on hend to hear him!"

Blanche saw plainly that her *quondam* lover was in no greater favor down- than up-stairs. "Give me my handkerchief, Jane; I must go, I'm so late. I shall speak to mamma about your being married."

The next time Colonel Radclyffe called he found her alone.

"Horace," she began rather abruptly, when he had sat down, "it can't be true, of course, it couldn't be—only just say so yourself, please,—that you tried to persuade Davis not to marry Jane."

He was very much taken aback. His impulse was to deny the accusation, but he would not tell Blanche a direct lie.

"I don't know about 'persuading,' Blanche; but, you know, it will be very miserable for them both. They will be very poor, and I can't afford to raise Davis's wages."

"Then you did advise him not to marry her? How could you do such a cruel thing?" and an expression of anger, almost aversion, such as his conduct to herself had never called forth, came into her face.

"Blanche, you needn't look as if you thought me the greatest brute living just because I have a little common sense!"

"Common sense!" she cried indignantly. "I call it heartless cruelty! Did you think what that poor girl would suffer if he had taken your advice?"

"Of course she wouldn't have liked it at first, but she would have got over it in time. It's nonsense looking at it in that sort of way."

"Nonsense? Have you any feeling, Horace? I would not believe you capable of such—of such conduct till I heard it from your own lips," and her eyes flashed with mingled tears and anger.

Horace's face hardened into a look that was ominous for Mr. Davis.

"Who told you this pretty story, with, no doubt, a thousand exaggerations?" he asked, his eyes darkening till they became almost black.

"Never mind. You have told me enough yourself to make me miserable. I could not have believed it of you!"

Davis's doom was sealed, as far as Horace was concerned, from that moment.

Had there been no other chance in the world of his earning bread and water he would not have kept him in his service: but no man likes a woman to think badly of him. Least of all did Horace wish Blanche to do so, therefore he said, in rather a deprecating voice, "You are very angry with me; but if you will think a minute you will see that the marriage is a mistake in every way. They are both first-rate servants now, but if they marry they will be no further use to us;—Jane won't to you, at any rate, and Davis can't keep a wife on the wages he has, unless she has something of her own."

"You must have a nice opinion of mamma and me to think us selfish enough to break a girl's heart because she does our hair well!" she returned contemptuously.

"Oh, if you are going in for those high-flying notions I have done. It was entirely for your benefit I spoke, though I hate a married man as my servant—and you are as angry with me as if I had committed a crime. It's the way of the world. No one likes to part with a good servant."

"Horace, it would be horribly unjust to prevent her marrying because she happens to suit us."

"That's ridiculous. The weakest must go to the wall."

She would not argue the point.

"We'll say no more about it, Horace. We should not agree."

He took his leave shortly afterwards, having asked her, in vain, to go out with him, and the next thing they heard was that he had given Davis notice to leave him that day month. He assigned no reason, and the man was in great distress, and asked to see Blanche to bespeak her intercession. She knew the cause of his dismissal well enough,—“No man stays in my service if he ever repeats a word I say to him:” but she did not tell him so; only promised to consult her mother as to what he had better do.

Little things tear the scales from our eyes—scales that mercifully blind us to the defects in our idols. For the first time Blanche made some approach to seeing Horace as he really was. Disillusion is very bitter always, but it is especially so to a nature like hers.

Not that she was one of those women, as silly as they are common, unfortunately, who expect their wretched male belongings to be perfect beings whom they can worship as gods, and who, on

discovering the slightest flaw, treat them as reprobates. She knew that no human being is free from defects, weaknesses, even serious blots sometimes, but try to make what excuse for him she would, Horace's conduct lately had struck her as innately ignoble. Her sense of right was very keen; she was so constituted that anything like injustice or oppression was abhorrent to her, and the idea that Jane, or any one, merely because she was weak, “should go to the wall,” or suffer, put her into a ferment of indignation. She knew, too, he had not told her the truth in saying he acted out of consideration for her and her mother, and felt her respect for him die suddenly, as though it had been a living thing.

“Oh, why was I born to sigh wae's me?”

The Horace she loved had never existed at all, but instead—she buried her face in the sofa cushions in an agony. “And yet he had good in him—he has—I know; if only he wouldn't make money his god! I can't have been so completely mistaken in him.”

After due consideration in full family conclave it was decided that Davis and Jane should take a house in Park Street and let it in apartments, Mrs. Seymour and Blanche being their first tenants. Jane's scanty savings did not go far towards setting up the new *ménage*, but Davis had a little stock in hand, and Charles and Geoffrey both contributed towards starting the young couple. Blanche was very active in forwarding the arrangements, knowing she was the cause of Davis's having lost his situation.

“Miss Blanche!” exclaimed the bride the day before the wedding, “Davis says he thinks you are an angel.”

The young lady laughed. “I'm very much flattered by his good opinion of me, Jane, and hope it will continue when I ring the bell impatiently for his wife to come and dress me.”

“He'd lie down and let you walk over his body, Miss Blanche, let alone of answering your bell. He says he hopes as you will be comfortable till we comes back on Monday. I'm only a poor girl, Miss Blanche, I can't say much, but oh!”—whereupon she burst into sobs and tears.

“Don't cry, Jane. I know all you mean to say, and if your eyes are red to-morrow what will Davis say?”

“Oh, my eyes won't make no difference to him, Miss Blanche, and I know

it's all your doin' about the house and all! and Davis and me, we wish as you was a-goin' to a house o' your own, too. Mr. Robins have told Davis as his master have a picture of you in his room."

"Of me? I never gave him one."

"Leastways it's not you, but it's just like you, and Robins heard Mr. Vivian ask her ladyship if it wasn't just like you. Robins have lived a great many years with Mr. Vivian, Miss Blanche."

"So I understand."

"He have told Davis as he never saw no picture of a lady in his room before, an' he never saw him so took up with any one as he is with you. He don't care for ladies in general, he don't, which Mr. Robins he says is a very onusual circumstance for a gentleman like him as is often too fond of them."

"I have no doubt, Jane, that Mr. Robins is a very observing young man, but if you spend any more time talking you won't be ready when Davis comes to take you to the play this evening."

CHAPTER L.

MR. RADCLYFFE'S principles and consistency had made the lives of his family a burden to them, and by a just retribution they were now rendering his own life equally one.

He had never been the same man since his fall;—the change was beneficial in many ways to those about him, though he did not think so, and lamented daily his lost health and strength. But he looked forward eagerly to August. He would surely be able to go to Scotland. Never a Twelfth had he missed since he went out, fifty years before, with his father, and he had always declared that he hoped the August when he could not go out after the grouse might be his last,—a declaration which called forth an annual protest from his wife.

"Fifty things might happen, Charles, to prevent your going to Scotland for the Twelfth, but you don't wish to die directly you can't shoot?" she would exclaim indignantly.

"Yes, I do," would rejoin her amiable spouse. "What else have I got to live for? When a gentleman can't hunt or shoot, the sooner he's made turnips of the better."

"It's very wicked of you to talk so.

How can you say you have nothing to live for when you have your wife and children?"

"Oh, my wife; I've had about enough of her!" would respond this noble specimen of the sex that claims superiority.

"Besides, how shall I feel at being left a widow?" would pursue Mrs. Radclyffe, who, being accustomed to his amenities, did not pause to notice them. "Uncommonly relieved," opined her friends, though decency restrained them from always saying so.

But now came an August when he could not shoot. He made all his preparations for Scotland with an eagerness almost ostentatious, and very sad for his wife and daughter to witness, but when the day came he had to confess that he was unequal to the journey. His family expected a storm of invective, but he was quite calm. Did he feel that Stronger Hand which could break even his iron strength and will? "You are right, Mary," he said, with unwonted gentleness, and sat silent for many hours.

Did he ever reflect? What are the secret thoughts of those who have made the misery of all about them? Do they know that for all these things—for every tear wrung from the eyes of their miserable victims—a God who hates oppression and wrong will call them to judgment!

It has been said that the veriest dullard who ever did despite to the Image in which he is made has his moments of reflection, and turns over in his mind the mighty problem of Life. The why—that awful puzzle which no theologian has ever yet solved or ever will;—the whither—the whence; so perhaps Mr. Radclyffe reflected. He consoled himself, at all events, like a philosopher, by anticipating September, and like a man, by hoping the grouse-shooting would be bad.

But September came, and he could not walk. Horace had to go out alone; and every bird he killed (his father insisted on minute details of the day's sport) was an additional aggravation of his forced inactivity. And now came the struggle with those respectable and conservative principles on which Mr. Radclyffe had always prided himself. The doctor strongly recommended a month at the sea. Hearing of the sport he could not share was driving him beyond the bounds of reason, and he felt himself that a change was necessary. But how sacrifice principle and consistency, and stultify himself in the eyes of his womankind? Had he not raved all his married life against "snobs who go to

the sea"? To be sure that was when it was only a question of his wife's benefit and pleasure. It was a question of his own now, which altered the case, of course, but still did not entirely cover the humiliation of a descent from his lofty stand-point. Yet the doctor was urgent, Mrs. Radclyffe was equally so; and curiosity was a potent motive-power, curiosity, namely, to see the place where yachts most do congregate.

Since his intimacy with Sir George Conway he had begun to comprehend that there was an amusement in which a gentleman might indulge almost as absorbing as sport; one which might, in fact, be made subservient to that sole delight of life, for in a yacht you can go to Norway, and fish and shoot there. Only snobs and counter-jumpers went to watering-places for a month, like clerks out for a holiday; but an English gentleman, whose "heritage was the sea," might keep a yacht, he decided, and by the same rule another English gentleman might allowably interest himself in the subject of yachts in general and one in particular. It was impossible to be much with Sir George without becoming aware of the merits of the *Leila*, which little craft was spoken of by its master with an affection and respect bordering on devotion, and only just not boring because of the speaker's honest enthusiasm and pleasant, handsome face. Anything new must always be a source of interest to a man who never looks into a book, even if it only afford a fresh subject for denunciation. Yachts and their ways were totally new to Mr. Radclyffe, and consequently interesting, so he was anxious to see the *Leila*, and she, if not at Cowes now, would be in the course of the season, and her owner had duly impressed on him with what pleasure he would give him an opportunity of finding his sea legs; so after many protestations and scenes, and the expenditure of a whole vocabulary of invective, the family from Deerscourt started for Cowes.

Leila had not seen either Sir George or Edythe since that day in February when she had hidden from him in the apple-loft. She thought with a dread which was not all fear of the probability of meeting him now. But she need not have been afraid. Sir George was not at Cowes. He and Percy Vivian were gone in the *Leila* to Norway and other out-of-the-way parts, and Edythe and Lady Eveleigh were getting through the time as well as they could without them.

It was not a very lively or exciting period to Leila. The anxieties and trials of her home life were telling on her health to a considerable extent. Mr. Radclyffe knew hardly any one there; his temper was frightful, and the strain of trying to amuse him great and unceasing. After he had watched the yachts and boats and the sea for an hour in the morning, and glanced over the papers, he had no resource left but abusing everybody and everything—denouncing the doctors who recommended the sea, and execrating the snobs who frequented it. His family knew the whole formulary by heart.

None of the Seymour party were at Ryde, as Leila hoped they would be, for though no one said so, all felt that Blanche ought not to go where she would be likely to meet Horace; and when Mrs. Seymour heard of the visit to Cowes she and Mabel decided that Heathfield air was quite as beneficial as any that blew on the Island. Not that Horace was much at Cowes. Faint heart never won fair lady. Having been defeated in his designs on Miss Conway's purse, he sought a fresh field of enterprise. He had met Miss Tryphena Thomas at Lady Eveleigh's during his courtship of Edythe, and when the latter declined to resolve herself into a permanent committee of supply for his benefit, he bethought himself of offering the office to the Welsh heiress; and having learned that she was gone to Wiesbaden with a lady-appurtenance in the shape of a companion, he followed thither, expecting his friends to believe that fraternal affection constrained him to visit his brother, who lived in Germany. So Leila found it very dull at Cowes. Very different to the days when Sir George Conway was there to place himself and his yacht at her disposal, and when the twenty-four hours were not long enough for the fun and frolic—the animated discussions and pleasant expeditions got up by the Seymours and Riverses, with Percy Vivian to act the part of general censor, and denounce their follies in his cynical way, while his eyes followed Blanche and glared at Horace alternately. Those days seemed a long way off, and were delightful in the retrospect. It is true Lady Eveleigh and Edythe were there, but the latter was depressed and out of spirits. She *said* she missed her brother. No doubt she did: she had hoped to go with him, but her aunt could not face the sea when the time came, and she would not leave her for so long a period as the expedition would necessarily occupy, so she stayed at home

"awearied," like Mariana in the moated grange.

Young ladies are accused of thinking perpetually of love and lovers.

"In the spring a young man's fancy

(and a young woman's, too, it is to be supposed)

Lightly turns to thoughts of love,"

but at the rate men are progressing there will soon be as little ground for the accusation as there is for the statement that the sun goes round the earth. The lords of the creation are taking very sure means to cure the sex of any undue predilection for them. The main object of most of the social essayists and many of the male novelists of the last ten years has been to impress on their feminine readers of how very little value their love is—or themselves either, in fact. They may serve to amuse the leisure hours of their superiors, but even then they must not attempt to compete with a horse, a dog, a gun, or whatever, indeed, happens to be their masters' reigning hobby. Savage onslaughts on them from masculine pens, with perpetual taunts as to the mental and moral inferiority attributed to them, and constant reminders how little their opinion is worth, are not very conducive to winning the love and confidence of generous, high-spirited women. The regard thus despised they cease to feel, while respect for those who can be both unjust and ungenerous gives place to a widely different feeling. But Miss Conway had not undergone a course of literature tending to impress on her what a despicable creature she was, nor had it been flung daily in her teeth that she was only a woman, consequently a thing without any natural claim to justice or right; she did not, therefore, deem herself a wretch merely tolerated out of pity, nor yet were all the antagonistic elements of her character brought into active exercise and undue prominence by sneers and reproaches, discreditable alike to the heads and hearts of those who utter them, and which, while they fail to insure submission, goad those at whom they are leveled into bitterness and rebellion. As she had not been forced to think her own love of no value, she was not ashamed to confess that the love of a good man was the thing she most desired on earth, and a happy marriage the most desirable destiny for man and woman both. She had seen a great deal of Percy Vivian, and

had discovered the real excellence that underlaid his self-sufficient, sarcastic manner and apparent cynicism. She had on many occasions proved his worth, and, in spite of herself, felt that it would make the happiness of her life to be his wife. She could feel sure, too, that in his case no mercenary views would influence his conduct. But he never evinced the slightest regard for her; and so carefully had she guarded her secret that no one suspected it till Blanche Seymour, rendered observant of such matters by her own experience, discovered it. She watched his gradual surrender to Blanche with interest and a sort of humorous jealousy, expressing to the latter very frequently her regret that no one would like her for herself, and wishing she resembled her.

After Blanche's rejection of Percy she hardly ever saw him. He kept away from every one, and when he did appear was more taciturn and sarcastic than ever. He consented to accompany Sir George "if he really was going—not merely hanging about Cowes and the Channel."

And so Edythe felt "awearied," but scolded herself vigorously for her folly, and made strenuous efforts not to think so much about him. Altogether she and Leila had a dull time of it.

"Cupid is a knavish lad
Thus to make poor females mad."

The weather was oppressively hot. Not a breath of air ruffled the sea. Morning after morning the sun rose in a cloudless sky, and sank evening after evening in gorgeous splendor to light up another world. Trees, flowers, cattle, and feathered fowls all pined for rain. Then came days when a canopy of electricity-charged vapor hung low over land and sea, and every one prayed for thunder to clear the air.

At last it came. The sea was a sheet of flame. "At the brightness of his presence his clouds removed: hailstones and coals of fire: the Lord also thundered out of heaven, and the Highest gave his thunder. He bowed the heavens also and came down, and it was dark under his feet." Humanity stood silent to watch that grand spectacle. Then "the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up;" it rained in torrents. The weather changed as completely as it is its privilege to do in this free country: fierce gales swept our ocean-bound shores, and many an agonized prayer went up "for those in peril of the sea."

do reports get about? Who first terance to the ghastly words that ring desolation to many a household? Can they be men, or are it rather fiends in mortal shape, port with the agonies of human by starting false news of the loss of souls or lives?

He knew who first bruited at Cowes among the numerous wrecks was one yacht, which had gone down with all hands on board. Then it was whispered that it was "Conway's yacht"—and only—for his sister and aunt own to have been uneasy since the storm of weather, and anxiously awaiting news of him.

Radclyffe went to the library near the house to change a book. While she was looking for a new one a gentleman

"Is it true, sir," inquired the girl behind the counter, "that Sir George Conway's yacht is lost?"

Sir George was as well known at Cowes as his own estates at Leighton.

"I'm afraid so, upon my word."

She started as if a shot had struck her. "The yacht?" she cried with blanched lips, her gray eyes fixed in horror.

"Only a report," said the gentleman, in alarm, and taking off his hat. The report frightened him.

"Is it possible?" she repeated, scarcely able to breathe.

"I can only say Sir George Conway's, but I don't mean certain."

She did not hear the end. She sank fainting. He caught her in his arms. Knowing she was not Miss Conway, he had not hesitated to bring out the water. Water was procured, and various other things—each one in itself abominable enough to make one faint; and he rushed in from abnormal side-ways, to look at Leila, offer help, and keep her air.

"Who is the young lady?" asked the gentleman; "do you know?" "No," they knew. She lived close by,"

She recovered, agonizingly conscious of what she had heard. "Tell me all you

Very little was known.

Leila had been seen in the Channel before the storm, a signal-gun on board, floating pieces of wreck were seen ashore, belonging, it was positively asserted, to the ill-fated yacht, and Sir George weathered the tempest he had never been heard of before this.

Leila rose to go home, whither the gentleman accompanied her. Mrs. Radclyffe's grief and horror surpass all description. She and Leila were on the point of starting for Lady Eveleigh's to break the news, when a messenger came from her requesting them to go to her at once. The report had reached them: she was prostrate, and Edythe frantic with despair, telegraphing wildly to every spot where it was likely or possible anything could be known of the *Leila*; and as hours went on and no ray of hope came, it was heart-rending to witness her sorrow. Leila, acute as was her own suffering, stood appalled before it.

Edythe's love for her brother was a passion. To say that she would have died for him poorly expresses the strength of her affection. He had been father, mother, sister, everything in the world to her, and no harsh word had ever passed his lips during all their years of intercourse.

"Oh, Leila, I can't live without him! Why did I not go, too, that I might have died with him!"

And yet Edythe's tears were not all for her golden-haired brother. A dark, stern face came between her and his bright one, and had its part in her mourning. One of her usual fits of illness came mercifully to her relief, and physical exhaustion blunted the keen edge of her despair.

Lord and Lady Glennorth went down to Cowes the moment the report reached them. Till their arrival Leila watched Edythe incessantly; then Lady Glennorth took her place and she had time to indulge her own grief. It overwhelmed and surprised her equally. The love for which Sir George had pleaded in vain sprang into vigorous life now when he was no longer there to claim it.

During one of Edythe's fits of wandering she had lamented "if Leila Radclyffe had married him it would never have happened!"

Coming in the silence of the night it sounded like a reproach from another world. Was she really guilty of his blood? Had her selfish fears sent him to an untimely death? Blanche's words came back to her—"If any misfortune befalls him I shall look on it as your fault." Her vivid imagination pictured him stark, his bright hair mixed with dank sea-weed, lying in the cold, green, cruel, fathomless depths. Near him his friend. "In their deaths they were not divided." Could it be that she should never see him again till the mandate had gone forth, "Give up the dead, thou sea"? She remem-

bered the last time they were together. He was standing,

"his sunny hair
Clustered about his temples like a god's,"

leaning against the crimson-curtained window in the drawing-room at Deers-court, listening to Blanche Seymour singing. She heard the sweet voice again—

"I saw my Jamie's wraith, for I couldna think it he,
And he said, Love, I'm come hame to marry thee"—

saw Horace's dark face "look stolen wise" at the singer—felt Sir George come over and sit down beside herself—every incident of that night, every word he said, was indelibly impressed on her memory.

"Miss Radclyffe, don't you think when Miss Seymour sings we ought to be allowed to turn our backs on each other, so that we might indulge our feelings unseen? I don't know how it may be with you, but when I hear her 'I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman.'" He was before her exactly as he sat, on a low chair, his coat sleeves gradually worked half way up his arms as they rested on his knees, in a way peculiar to him when he was talking to a lady. He was thoughtful and kept his eyes on the carpet except when he would every now and again turn to look at her face. "Well," he said suddenly, "one must make up one's mind to a disagreeable thing some time or other, so I suppose Percy and I ought to be making tracks. Will you sing me one song before I go? I like to hear your voice the last." And when he and Percy started for their ten miles' drive home, she and Blanche drew back the heavy curtains and stood looking out at them and the moonlight, as they went off in the dog-cart, the red ends of their cigars showing like two tiny fires. Sir George, turning, saw the figures at the window, and hastily took his cigar from his lips and raised his hat, all with one hand, the other being occupied with the reins. She could only think of him now, his face white in the moonlight, as she saw him at that moment. Like all imaginative girls, she was very timid, literally "afraid where no fear was," and conjured up wonderful spectres in the dark to scare herself withal. Would she, she thought now in terror, see her lover's wraith come to reproach her? She became rigid from absolute dread, and sat expecting every moment to see the ghostly vision enter, to claim her, perhaps, as his bride, as William did Lenore. The tension of her

nerves was so great that by the time Lady Glennorth, with whom she was sharing the watch—Lady Eveleigh was too ill for any exertion—came in she had quite lost all self-command, and flew to her side, clinging to her in wild alarm. "Oh, Lady Glennorth! am I the cause of his death? will God call me to account for it? Edythe says if I had married him it would not have happened."

"God knows, dear," whispered Lady Glennorth; "my poor husband, who is frantic at the loss of his brother, says the same about Blanche Seymour, but I tell him it is no use talking about what might have been. We must try to submit to God's will."

"Do you think he was very miserable?" asked Leila, trembling violently. "I mean because I would not marry him. I could not—I was so frightened! Oh, I would now, if he were only here!"

"You must go to bed, my poor child; you are overdone," said Lady Glennorth soothingly.

"No, no; I can't be alone. Let me stay with you! I keep on seeing him!" she cried in a fresh access of terror.

"Hush! you will wake Edythe. Come and sit by me here," and she put her arms round her and succeeded in calming her after a time.

Mrs. Radclyffe was completely puzzled at Leila's conduct. She had persistently refused to marry the man, yet now that he was gone she was as desperate with grief as if she had been devoted to him. "I always do say, my dear," she wrote to Blanche, "that girls are the queerest things in the world, and there is no accounting for what they'll do." What Mrs. Radclyffe considered Blanche it is hard to say;—a creature without any entity, probably, made to be the recipient of her troubles.

CHAPTER LI.

No one will have been insane enough to imagine that Sir George Conway and Mr. Vivian were really drowned, and two maidens left forlorn.

The *Leila* had undergone all that a yacht can undergo short of absolute shipwreck, and had at last succeeded in gaining a French port, whence Sir George sent a telegram to allay any fears that might be entertained on his account. But the most important telegrams are invariably

"delayed in transmission," so it came to pass that his was not received for three days after it was sent; and all postal communication being stopped by the stormy state of the weather, which prevented the boats starting, the letters he wrote were not received for some time after they were dispatched.

On the arrival of the telegram the sudden reaction from overwhelming, crushing grief to rapturous joy was almost as trying as the first news of the reported disaster, but in process of time both young ladies recovered, with their lovers, their wonted health and spirits, and Edythe was able to write to her brother a full account of all they had endured and of Leila's manifestations of distress. "She can't have the face to refuse you again after it, though I think she is very anxious now to get away from Cowes before you return. Take my advice, therefore, and strike while the iron is hot."

The amiable and knightly Sir Brian informed Rebecca, after having terrified her nearly out of her life, that he did not regret his violence, "for it was necessary for the display of thy character." Sir George was neither so selfish nor so heartless as not to regret the suffering his reported death had caused, but there *was* a certain balm in hearing how Leila had received the news. He told Percy he thought he should go to England at once, and leave him to follow in the yacht when he was so disposed. His friend had become more tolerant of his weakness lately. How willingly would he have gone to the world's end had Blanche Seymour been the goal!

Sir George arrived unexpectedly at his aunt's house, and found Edythe alone in her room. The brother and sister were locked in each other's arms, and for some moments neither spoke. Then Edythe, ever unselfish, "Darling, Leila is in the drawing-room. Go to her at once; if she knows you are here she will run away. She is horribly ashamed of having fainted, and is getting more frightened every day."

Miss Radclyffe had related to Edythe the story of her flight to the apple-loft, and now that her lover was come to life again, heartily repented the confession. She was sitting on the sofa when she heard a light, firm tread which made her breath come quick, and before she had time to escape or even look round, she found herself clasped in a pair of velvet-clad arms, and a moustached face covering her own with kisses.

"Leila, my darling! I won't take

'no' for an answer this time, not if you said it twenty times!"

"Oh, Sir George!" (in a frightened voice, trying to free herself.)

"Not 'Sir George,' Leila. It must never be that any more. Tell me you are glad to see me, my darling, and let me hear from your own lips that you will be my wife."

The word brought back all the horror which had filled her mind ever since she had been old enough to think on the subject, but the agonies of remorse she had lately undergone were not lightly to be incurred again, while a feeling quite apart from these fears, and seeming as if it belonged to a different being, not to her, Leila Radclyffe, made her shrink from doing aught to give him pain. Her face turned deadly cold from the struggle, even beneath the kisses he was lavishing on her. He noticed it, and holding her away from him, asked, turning very white himself, "Leila, can I be mistaken? do you still refuse? have you——"

"No, oh, no!" she exclaimed in terror, "only—only——"

He placed her on the sofa, and taking his arm from her waist, stood opposite her.

"Leila, you look frightened to death. Is it that you cannot love me? I thought—I hoped—but I don't want a reluctant consent. If you could have given yourself to me willingly, I would have done all that man could to make you happy; if you can't do that——" he stopped abruptly.

"I can—I do," she cried hastily, appalled at the expression of his face.

"Then why are you so terrified? You are as pale as if I was taking you to execution. That is not the look you would have if you were glad to see me."

"Oh, I *am* glad to see you! I am not quite heartless. I was sorry beyond anything I can say"—she brought out in spasmodic jerks, raising her eyes to his at the last sentence.

"Girls are the rummest concerns" was Sir George's version of the sentiment Mrs. Radclyffe had expressed to Blanche regarding those astonishing phenomena. He was utterly perplexed. He wanted to marry her of all things. He had everything else in the world he desired. She was the one thing denied him, and the difficulty of winning her increased his eagerness to succeed; but he did not want a bride whose eyes assumed a look of terror, and whose face became cold and rigid as marble beneath his kisses. Yet he had been told she fainted and shed bitter tears

at his reported death. He did not know what to make of her.

"Leila," he said, still standing before her, "answer me one question, will you?"

"Yes."

"Do you like me or do you not?" and he fixed his eyes keenly on her.

"I do," she murmured, but so low that he could not catch it, her head was so bent.

"I can't understand what you say," in a despairing tone. "Look here, Leila, don't let us misunderstand each other. What we are doing now is for life, and I must have a distinct answer. For years the one thing I have striven for and longed for has been to have you for my wife, but if you feel you cannot like me and trust me fully, say so without fear, and I swear to you before God I will thank you for your honesty and never trouble you again. Now, do you like me or not?" he stood with his eyes fixed on her, waiting his doom.

"I do. I like you better than any one in the world," and her face glowed suddenly.

"Then why do you look so frightened? Why are you so cold?"

She was silent.

"There must be perfect confidence, Leila, or it is no use. Do you not trust me?"

Of course she burst into tears, and buried her face in her hands. What else could she do when he stood opposite to her in that way, looking grave as she had never seen him before, and driving her into a corner by his questions? He was beside her in an instant, and putting an arm round her, tried to withdraw her hands.

"Leila, my darling, don't cry, only, for God's sake, tell me what you are afraid of. Don't you trust me?"

She was not a crying girl. Her tears were rare and few. She wiped them away now quickly, "Yes—I do. I think I do."

"Think, Leila? are you not sure? What are you afraid of? tell me."

"I have always had such a horror of marrying," she pleaded, in so low a voice that he had to bend his head to catch her words.

"But if you like me and trust me, you can't feel that now?"

"No—o; but you asked me why I was frightened."

"But you are not afraid of me now, Leila? you trust me entirely, don't you?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes; I do now."

He raised her bent face to kiss her. "My own darling! May Heaven's heaviest curse fall on me if ever I do anything to make you regret this day! And with your love to be my safeguard I'm not afraid of myself," said the young man confidently. "You do love me, Leila? let me hear you say so once again."

"I do, very dearly," whispered the girl, "and you must not think I was not more glad, more delighted than I can say, when I heard you were safe, only when you came in I could not speak—but you believe it, don't you?" Her face was not cold now, but glowing with a crimson blush.

"I do, indeed, my darling. And God bless you for telling me so yourself. You won't be a little skeptic any more, will you, and think in your heart that I'm a sc—well, that I mean to bully you?"

"I never was afraid of you personally," she said hastily.

"You won't find me very formidable or exacting," said he, all his soul in his eyes, "and you won't run away from me as you did at Deerscourt, when I wanted so much to see you and waited so long in vain? Tell me, Leila, where did you go that day?" he asked laughing.

"Well, darling?" inquired Edythe, when at last her brother made his appearance, "is it all settled? What a time you have been!"

"It's hard work proposing, Edythe."

"But is it all right? does she consent?"

"Yes, though she was as difficult to stalk as a deer, and as wild."

"Oh, she won't be so any more now."

"Well, perhaps not; I may succeed in taming her in time," and then, after his sister had embraced him and congratulated him to her heart's content, he went out. She felt a vague sense of disappointment. She had expected him to be rapturously delighted.

"*Je voudrais me faire moine*," wrote Albert de la Ferronays the night before his marriage, though he had been moving heaven and earth to secure Alexandrine as his bride. Sir George did not wish to be a monk,—monasticism does not suit the genius of Englishmen,—but he felt a strong desire to be alone and to solace himself with a cigar.

In half an hour he returned as buoyant and glad as Edythe could wish, to take Leila home and face the heads of the Radclyffe family.

To say that Mrs. Radclyffe was in the

seventh heaven but faintly expresses her joy at the announcement. She felt that Providence had crowned the edifice of her life, and embraced her future son-in-law with lachrymose effusion, very much to the amusement and slightly to the embarrassment of that estimable young baronet. It is true one of her children was still unattached, but an unmarried son can never be as great a reproach as an unmarried daughter; nor had Horace ever given her any reason to believe he had taken women "*en horreur*;" she was, therefore, less acutely uneasy about him, much as she desired his marriage. She wrote to all her friends, calling on them to rejoice with her, and only wished the number had been greater, that her joy might be more fully diffused—singing Sir George's praises so enthusiastically that her correspondents devoutly wished him married and done for, so that they might hear no more about him.

In her eyes he united in his own person all the good and grand qualities which she used to hear her friends attribute to their mankind, and to the recital of which she listened with a sort of awed wonder, Providence having denied her, in her journey through life, any acquaintance herself with such godlike creatures. But now she would have a man in her family on whom she could really rely;—to whom she could tell everything without the fear of prejudicing him violently either one way or the other; who was endowed with the "reason firm, the temperate will;" who neither swore nor raged nor was "rampaginous." Oh, Mrs. Radclyffe felt that she had immense capacities for worshipping a man if only she had ever come across one worthy of being worshiped. But Heaven had not quite forgotten her, and was about to make her amends for all her troubles by "the most perfect son, my dear, that ever mother was blessed with." She scorned the name of mother-in-law. She took her daughter's husband to her heart of hearts, and was prepared to sacrifice herself as freely for him as for one of her own children. Fate was bent on heaping blessings at this time on her head. Horace was, of course, promptly written to, and informed of the happy event; and instead of sending a letter of congratulation, came himself to complete his mother's bliss by announcing that he was engaged to Miss Thomas. Mrs. Radclyffe was enraptured. She felt almost inclined to say "it is too much," and her joy would have been more than she could have borne had there not been a draw-

back. "Dear Leila seemed so little *empressée* about her brother's happy prospects. To be sure Leila was always cold, but she used to be so fond of Horace, it was odd she was not more pleased at his engagement."

"Mamma, I most sincerely wish him every happiness," was all Leila would say.

"It is so odd you are not enchanted!" lamented her mother; "when you know how I have been longing for dear Horace to marry. An heiress, too! He says she has one hundred thousand pounds."

"Oh, I have no doubt she is very rich," returned Leila dryly.

"Leila, you speak as if it was a crime to be rich! Dear George, the very best man that ever lived, is rich too, but you do not dislike him for that. I'm sure I'm delighted she is rich. In fact, Horace could not marry her if she was not, with his extravagant habits and all! I'm sure dear George must think it a good thing."

"Dear George" was becoming a by-word in the Radclyffe family.

"Mrs. Radclyffe thinks Conway a sort of God Almighty," remarked Mr. Radclyffe irreverently and viciously.

But the baronet had his own opinion of the match.

"Leila and I must be married before they are," he observed to his sister, "for they will fight like cat and dog, and she'll cry off if she sees such a specimen of married life."

"I pity Miss Thomas from my heart," said Edythe. "How can she be such a fool?"

"I pity him," returned her brother, "only he must know what he's doing. I should think her dearly purchased if she had the Bank of England at her back."

"George, I have no Christianity left where he is concerned. His conduct to poor Blanche Seymour has been so atrocious that I assure you I can hardly speak to him. Besides, it is so barefaced! He proposed to me in June, and in October is engaged to another woman!"

Sir George shook his head. "It is a miserable business from beginning to end," said he.

"And she will be wretched!" continued Miss Conway. "He'll be his father over again to a woman he does not care for. I always wondered how Blanche, who is so charming, could be so infatuated about him."

She forgot that she had, for a very brief period, reflected on his merits as concerning herself.

"Your charming sex, Miss Conway, is apt to surrender at discretion to a handsome face," said her brother.

"Fools that they are! Nina Glennorth says it is just that. Miss Polly is simply bewitched by his good looks. She will wake up from her dream some fine day to find how hard and unrelenting his beautiful face and soft voice can be."

There is no sweet without its bitter. As knowledge respecting her future daughter-in-law dawned on her, Mrs. Radclyffe found her joy somewhat damped.

Had Blanche Seymour wished to be revenged on Horace Radclyffe—which she did not—she would have been fully so had she known what he underwent in announcing his engagement to his family, and still more the feelings with which he looked forward to introducing his *fiancée*.

"Who is Miss Thomas, dear?" had inquired his mother somewhat doubtfully. "I don't know the name."

"She is of a Welsh family, mother. She is a cousin of Lady Glennorth's."

"Oh, then, I'm sure she's nice. Any one who has to do with that sweet little Lady Glennorth must be! If I live a thousand years, I shall never forget her kindness when Leila was in such a state about George. Only Thomas isn't a very—isn't a name one knows."

"It's a Welsh name, mother," he repeated.

"Is she nice-looking, dear? because of your father, you know," in a deprecating voice.

"She is not a beauty, mother, and she has been better looking than she is now; but she isn't ugly."

"O-o-oh! Then, she is not quite young, dear?"

This was a very mild way of putting it. Miss Thomas was five years older than Colonel Radclyffe.

"Well, no, mother. I should not care now for a very young wife, but she is very sensible and all that." As he pronounced this verdict he bethought himself of his betrothed's floating hair—of her political and religious diatribes, to which he had listened with mingled feelings of astonishment and disgust, wondering the while if he should ever be able to calm her zeal, and congratulating himself that she was, at least, a Tory, so there was some chance of her and his father agreeing. Had she been a Liberal he dared not have presented her at Deerscourt. He almost

trembled as he reflected on the scenes which would, in such a case, have taken place at dinner. It was all very well for Blanche Seymour, with her sweet face and sweeter manner, to laugh at Mr. Radclyffe's Toryism and propound her Liberal opinions, but his imagination failed to picture the disastrous results if Miss Thomas had adopted that line. He debated whether he should prepare his mother for her style of *coiffure*, and decided that it would be better to give her a ~~hint~~

"She has her own way of doing things, you know, mother. Her hair, for instance——"

"What, dear?" she asked in alarm. "It isn't red, is it, Horace? your father hates red hair so."

"Mother, I don't choose a wife with hair to suit my father's tastes," returned the young man, somewhat impatiently. "The color is well enough, and she has a great lot of it, but she wears it down over her shoulders."

"Won't you tell her to put it up?" inquired his mother, hastily.

"Well, that was what I was going to say. Don't you think, if I was to ask her, she would?"

"Why, of course, my dear, I suppose she will do as you tell her when she is married to you."

"Oh, certainly; only I was thinking whether I could say anything just at first"—he stopped or the sentence was lost in his moustache.

"You must know that best, dear," said Mrs. Radclyffe, her joy considerably qualified. She felt certain her husband would hate his new daughter-in-law, and probably—in fact, most likely—quarrel with her.

"Is she amiable, dear?" she questioned.

"Yes, mother; she is amiable," returned her son, though sooth to say he had strong misgivings on the matter. The question uppermost in his mind when in her company was—"how shall I break her in and keep her in order?"—a thought more often present in men's minds during courtship than the women, whom they flatter and smile on till they are once fairly in the toils, have any idea of.

When Miss Tryphena was gazing in admiration on his beautiful face, descending meanwhile on one of her favorite topics, she little dreamed that her listener was mentally measuring his strength with hers, in anticipation of the post-nuptial warfare he meant to wage.

He made similar calculations with re-

gard to Edythe Conway, but that astute young lady was quite aware of his amiable intentions towards her, and had no intention of putting it in his power to fulfill them. Had he been engaged to Blanche no thought of conflict would have crossed his mind; he loved and revered her too much, and felt too certain of her devotion, to entertain any idea of quarreling with her or "breaking her in," but no such sentiments restrained him respecting Miss Tryphena, and there seemed every probability of a combat *à outrance* between the pair till one or other succumbed. Only he was doubtful what line of attack to assume. "Shall I come unto you with a rod or in love?" was the query he put to himself over and over again. He felt sadly in want of some one to advise him what course to pursue. His sensations resembled those of a person condemned to a long journey with a lately released lunatic, and sorely exercised as to the best means of controlling him should he suddenly prove refractory.

CHAPTER LII.

WHILE Leila and Edythe were lamenting their lovers and rejoicing over their recovery at Cowes, and Colonel Radclyffe was arranging the terms of that journey he intended taking with Miss Thomas, Blanche Seymour was teaching herself how to live a life from which all the romance and brightness were eliminated at Heathfield.

Since the dismissal of Davis she had seen Horace rarely. Once he had tried to make her confess that he had only followed the dictates of common sense in the advice he had given his servant, but he could not bring her to do so.

"It was not right, Horace; and it was horribly cruel to Jane. You would not have acted so yourself, I presume," and she looked at him.

"No," he had muttered, and when he left her he decided that her temper was not so sweet as he used to think it, while she felt bitterly—"setting aside the right and wrong of it, how could he be so unkind to me as to give such advice when he knew how interested I was in Jane?" So the breach between them was almost complete.

Ralph, too, was an unceasing source of

anxiety and trouble to them all. In spite of every entreaty, he had given up the appointment his brother-in-law had got for him, and was now a gentleman at large at Heathfield, much to the discomfort of its inmates.

Ralph was nothing if not critical. His mission was to find fault with every one and everything. It was the one occupation of which he never wearied. His sister's *ménage* was the constant theme of his animadversion—the method of carrying out the shooting arrangements especially arousing his deepest resentment.

Mabel was beginning to find the strain of perpetually smoothing over his interference and remarks to her husband tell on her considerably.

One day Blanche and her mother found her in her boudoir looking flushed and tearful.

"What is it, Mabel dear?" both asked. She tried to avoid the question, but on their repeating it—"The fact is," she said, tearing up a bit of paper nervously, "I am a little vexed and worried. Poor Ralph! I am so sorry for him and all his troubles, but he does go on so about the shooting!"

"What has he been saying, darling?" inquired her mother.

"Why, he wants me to send away Jackson, the keeper. He says he doesn't understand the management of pheasants, and that there are no birds."

"I don't see that it is any business of his," said Blanche.

"Well, Charlie told him he might do anything he pleased about the shooting, but then he never dreamed of his sending away poor old Jackson. Why, he has been here, mamma, ever since Charlie was quite a little boy. Of course I know he is not a good keeper,—he is too old;—but he does all Charlie wants."

"I should not care what Ralph says, dear, if I were you," returned her sister.

"But he keeps on so. Naturally I like him to be happy here," said Mabel tearfully, "but then I don't want to worry Charlie. I tried to explain to Ralph that he doesn't care for so much preserving, but he said women knew nothing about shooting, and that I refused to do the only thing I could, which is to get Charlie to send away Jackson. I do know enough about shooting to know what my own husband likes," she went on rather indignantly. "He does not like *battue* shooting, but it pleases him to go out with his gun when he is here in the autumn, and walk about with Jackson

and his dogs,—it amuses him and gives him exercise. Besides, he does not approve of all that over-preserving."

"It would be very hard if poor Charlie might not please himself on his own property," said Blanche.

"Ralph says he is not a good shot," said Mabel, in a shaking voice. "I don't say he is. He does not pretend to be a great sportsman like Horace Radclyffe or Sir George Conway, but he can do other things that perhaps they can't do." It was evident that her brother's reflections on her husband's skill as a marksman had wounded Mrs. Maynard deeply.

"Ralph is not such a great shot himself. I have seen him miss things quite close," said Blanche, whose ideas of good shooting were formed on the Horatian model.

"Ralph says Charlie would send Jackson away if I asked him. I dare say he would. He would do anything I asked him, I know," said Mabel, with a young wife's pride in her husband's affection, "but for that very reason I would not ask him to do what I know would give him pain. He would be miserable if he sent Jackson away, though he might not like to refuse me; besides, the poor old man would break his heart. Ralph says, 'pension him,' but no pension would make up to him for the pleasure of looking after *they pheasants*."

"I do wish Ralph could get some employment," said Mrs. Seymour; "it is dreadful his idling away his time here."

"Mamma dear, Charlie and I are delighted to have him," said Mabel, fearful her mother would imagine they thought him *de trop*.

"Yes, dear; but he ought not to be living on other people. You and Charlie are all that is kind, but it is an unworthy position for Ralph."

Mabel soon had a fresh cause for anxiety. Her brother's demands for money were constant and excessive. He drained his mother's scanty resources; and those being exhausted, he appealed to his sister again and again for assistance. She gave out of her own allowance so far as she could without encroaching on what was necessary for her personal expenses, but this did not satisfy him, and he reproached her for her niggardliness and unwillingness to help him, though she spared no expense, he insinuated, for her own dress. The taunt hurt her deeply, though she concealed how much she felt it, from love to him.

"I'm not extravagant," she pleaded to her sister, "but Charlie likes to see me

well dressed. It is his little vanity about me, and I think I'm bound to please him. Besides, I don't like giving Ralph money without telling Charlie, even though it is my own allowance, and he said I might do as I liked with it; and it is very humiliating to me to have to do that, though nothing can be nicer or kinder than Charlie is about it."

"I simply feel in despair about Ralph," said Blanche. "He won't keep anything, so it is almost no use getting him employment. The anxiety is killing mamma; besides, he does not leave her a sixpence. If it were not for Uncle Rivers I don't know what she would do."

"What does Ralph do with the money?" exclaimed Mabel. "I gave him fifty pounds not so long ago, and it seemed to be gone in no time."

"Fifty pounds, Mabel? I never heard that."

"No; I never told you, it was so painful altogether. Charlie did not like my dress at the Winchester ball, and asked me to get a new one for ours. I said I couldn't afford it, and he wanted to increase my allowance, so I had to tell him it was quite large enough, only I had paid a bill for Ralph. He had begged me so to do it for him, and promised to repay it; but I know he won't. Indeed, how can he?"

"It is too shameful of Ralph. I hope Charlie was not angry?"

"Angry? no. He was so dear and good about it," and Mabel's eyes filled with tears, "he looked as much ashamed of himself as if he had committed a crime, and gave me a check for fifty pounds to give Ralph; and he, who knows nothing about the names of dress or anything, though he is just a little fidgety about the way I am got up—wrote and ordered the dress I wore at the ball here from London himself, and gave it to me as his present, he said, as if almost everything I have is not his present, dear fellow!" and she wiped away some tears. "Yet in no time Ralph came to me again for money, and has asked me for some to-day. What can I do? I had to refuse. I cannot ask Charlie again, and I won't give it without his leave."

"Ralph would not wish that, dear, reckless as he is," said Blanche.

"I don't know," sighed Mabel. "He did not say in so many words that I might do so, but he hinted it. He said, as I managed everything now and kept the check-book, Charlie would not watch or know every five pounds I spent."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Blanche. "I never thought Ralph would do that. He can have no sense of honor left."

"I told him it would be a nice way to justify Charlie's confidence in me, but he only got angry, and there the matter rests. Don't tell mamma: it only worries her and can do no good."

The source of all this annoyance went up to London a few days afterwards, having extracted his mother's last five pounds for the purpose, saying he had an appointment in view which would set him up again, and render him quite independent. He assured her if he could only get it he would keep it; she might be certain of that. "I don't want Maynard to know anything of it, mother: he is a supercilious fellow, and I would rather not be under any further obligation to him."

Mr. Seymour did not mind borrowing Mr. Maynard's money, nevertheless. Mrs. Seymour sighed. She confessed to herself that Ralph's departure even for a day or two would be a relief. Charles Maynard was very much in love with his wife, and willing to endure a good deal for her sake; he was, besides, one of those kindly, slow, patient individuals, gifted with a vast fund of long-suffering, especially towards younger men, but he was beginning to wince under Ralph's continued assumptions and ill-concealed sneers. At first he had hardly comprehended them—he was so large-hearted and generous himself that he never suspected ill-nature in another—though he was conscious of a feeling of discomfort and discontent after an hour passed in his brother-in-law's company; but as he became more acquainted with his wife's family, and as association with her rendered him brighter and keener of perception, he learned to understand his brother-in-law's sarcasms and slighting inuendoes. Yet he bore them with a dignified composure, almost womanly, as if they had been too insignificant to hurt him; but though he did not resent his sneers, it was very different when Ralph openly assailed his conduct as a magistrate, and canvassed his action in several local matters, often before the servants. Then he asserted himself fully; and as Ralph, who held his intellect in the most supreme contempt, resented this, it may be conceived that Mabel had not a very easy part to perform. She was beginning to dread dinner-time,—why do men always choose that meal to quarrel over, thereby rendering it a period of purgatory to their womankind?—and still more the half-hour during which her

husband and brother sat over their wine, without her presence to quell any rising storm.

"I wish some one would make it the fashion for the gentlemen to leave the room with the ladies," was her constant remark when she saw Charles come in, his face redder than usual and his brow cloudy, and knew by the turn of Ralph's moustache that the pair had been having a skirmish.

Some one has said that a little lively discussion assists digestion. Messrs. Maynard and Seymour must have had theirs in excellent condition, for their post-prandial discussions were not only lively, but energetic, and might sometimes even be said to verge on the bellicose. Such being the state of the domestic barometer at Heathfield, it was no wonder Mrs. Seymour acknowledged that her son's absence would be a relief. It was, indeed, accepted by the household as a sort of holiday. Charles Maynard could indulge in those little caresses and demonstrations to his wife which he carefully abstained from before his brother-in-law, while the ladies could give expression to numerous small flatteries and tender attentions, delightful to them to offer and to him to receive, without the fear of Ralph's scoffing eyes to damp their enthusiasm.

But the respite was not of long duration. Mr. Seymour returned in a few days in a high state of excitement. He came by an early train and went straight to Blanche's room, where she usually wrote her letters of a morning.

"Blanche, I want you to do something for me," he said, sweeping his beard over her face by way of fraternal salutation. "I don't often ask a favor of you, so I hope you won't make any difficulty."

"Not if I can help it, you may be sure, Ralph. What can I do for you?"

"I want you to get Percy Vivian to write to Lord —— about this appointment. It is nine hundred pounds a year, and would be the making of me, and would enable me to make you and my dear mother quite comfortable. Vivian did Lord —— a great service once abroad, and he promised to do anything for him at any time. The appointment is in Lord ——'s hands, and a letter from you to Vivian would do the business for me. I know how intimate you are with him, so there can be no difficulty."

At his first words she had colored painfully. "Oh, dear Ralph, I am so sorry, but I could not write to Mr. Vivian."

"Why on earth not?"

"I have no right. I am not on such terms with him as to entitle me to do so."

"Not on such terms? With a man who is always after you and all that? You have as much right as any lady has to ask a gentleman to do her a service."

"Ralph, you are mistaken, indeed. I have seen nothing of Mr. Vivian for a long time."

"No, because Mabel would not ask him here, as I told her she ought to do, so he went with Conway, but a letter can get to him. Miss Conway knows where to send it, no doubt."

"But, Ralph, is it a post suitable for you?" she asked, seeking a loop-hole of escape.

Ralph Seymour was sublime when his fitness for *any* position under the sun was doubted, especially by a woman. He drew himself up now, with an air of implied pity for her ignorance which ought to have annihilated her, had she been possessed of any sense of her own littleness.

"We won't discuss that point," he answered with a majestic wave of his hand, slightly closing his eyes. "The question is of the letter." He was always terse when he wished to be impressive.

"Would it not do to apply to any one but Mr. Vivian? I would rather not write to him."

"I have already explained why his interest is so desirable," he answered with just that inclination of his person sufficient to indicate his superiority.

"Then, dear Ralph, will you write yourself to Sir George or to Edythe about it, not mentioning my name at all? You know Edythe very well, and I'm sure she would do all she could for you."

"Why should I do that, when it is so much easier for you to write?"

"Because—because it will do just as well, dear."

"Pardon me"—another slight salaam—"it will not do as well. There are certain periods in the life of the members of my sex when the influence of a member of yours is supreme. It is a fever, and passes off, but while it lasts it is omnipotent. From what I have observed and heard, I should say"—a magnificent bow took the place of the connecting conjunction—"you possess, at this moment, the empire over the man who can be of the greatest service to your brother at this critical conjuncture, therefore no other applicant can be so potent as yourself." His manner was grandiose beyond description.

"Ralph dear, I have not told you, because it is disagreeable to talk of such things, but Mr. Vivian proposed to me before we left London, and I refused him, so you see I could hardly write to him."

"Refused him?" he was astonished out of his affectation, and spoke naturally for the moment. "What insensate folly induced you to do that?"

"What makes any one do it? I did not want to marry him."

"Consummate nonsense! What motive could you have had? or has a woman ever a reasonable motive for anything she does?"

"Ralph, I did not care for him."

"Great heavens! The only use a girl can be to her family is to make a good marriage, and you refuse the best *parti* in England! Pinning your faith on that fellow Radclyffe, I suppose?"

Her sudden flush told him he had hit, or nearly hit, the truth.

"You showed your sense! I know, on the best authority, that he has just sold his handsome face for a hundred thousand pounds."

"What do you mean, Ralph?"

"He is engaged to that mad cousin of Lady Glennorth's—the Welsh heiress. He followed her to Germany, not to lose sight of her, and they both came back a day or two ago."

Even he was touched by the look that came into her face, and, notwithstanding his anger, would have given worlds to unsay the words the moment they were said. She turned deadly pale, and the pen with which she had been nervously playing dropped from her fingers. It was not the shock of hearing that the man she loved was engaged to another. She expected that at some time, sooner or later—but that he should sell himself so palpably! He, whose fastidious taste found it hard to reconcile himself to an alliance with Edythe Conway, refined, young, charming, because she did not come up to his ideal of beauty, to marry Miss Thomas—a woman whose every movement and tone must jar on all his susceptibilities! And on so short an acquaintance, too!

"Blanche, I'm sorry I told you so suddenly—I am, indeed—but you see what he is! I can't think how you, who are generally sharp enough, did not discover long ago that he meant marrying money."

"You mistake, Ralph. I am sorry, for Horace's own sake, that he is going to marry such a woman as Miss Thomas, but he had nothing to do with my refusal of Mr. Vivian."

"Then take my advice, and think better of your refusal. You can bring him back with a word. A girl always can in these cases. A letter to him about this appointment will be doing a service to you, to him, and to me." So as the last pronoun was attended to little cared Ralph about the others—comparatively, that is, for he was fond of his sister, in a way, and proud of her. He used all his efforts to persuade her that she might with perfect propriety write the letter he wished, but in vain. He could not overcome her repugnance to such a proceeding, much as it cost her to refuse his request.

"Indeed, I would do it if I could," she protested in tears; "but, don't you see, Ralph, that I can't? Tell Charlie. He will help you,—he has such interest."

"You decline to give me the help you could and might; I neither ask nor want your advice," and he left the room in fierce anger.

She sat for a minute or two quite still, feeling completely numbed. Was it all true, or only a horrible dream? Horace engaged! and he had not even told her! and it would henceforth be a sin to think of him! But she could not indulge her grief at this moment. The question of Ralph and his affairs was pressing. Was she justified in refusing to write that letter? It was utterly repugnant to her to do so, and she felt she had no right to make any claim on Mr. Vivian; but her brother's necessities were great. It was his own fault, certainly, that he was thus reduced, but that was a greater reason for pitying him. He was her brother. In spite of his faults, the thought of his anxieties and sufferings wrung her heart. She knew his pride—blamable, it may be—but she could sympathize with it, and with his dislike of appealing to his brother-in-law again. Was it not selfish, unsisterly, to put her own sensitive feelings before his welfare? She knew, too, what a relief it would be to Mabel not to have him any longer dependent on her husband's bounty—for, disguise the fact as they might, that was the real state of the case. Unless he stayed at Heathfield how long would he have a roof over his head? He was completely penniless, and his mother's resources were at an end. And she could change all this, for she knew that a line from her to Percy would secure the appointment, or if not that, some other, yet that line she could not overcome her instinctive dislike to writing. His words recurred to her, "In fact, you consider that you are conferring a favor

by accepting one." How would he interpret any letter of hers on such a subject? Would he not, as Ralph said, look on it as a recall? Her regrets for Horace seemed a far-off, trifling sorrow compared to her brother's pressing necessities, which it was in her power to alleviate. She pictured him, poor, perhaps hungry (there was no possible misery she did not conjure up), his clothes getting gradually shabbier, and he sinking daily lower, as poverty makes people sink—men especially, and her mother broken-hearted. She resolved to go and consult the latter; but she had been anticipated. Ralph was already with her.

In all domestic warfare each party hastens to headquarters to give the first version of the *casus belli*, and the belligerents who have just rushed away from each other in the drawing-room meet at the top of the stairs, both bound for the same Court of Appeal.

"A romantic little fool!" were the words, spoken in Ralph's most cutting tones, which greeted her ears as she opened the door. She was aware that this disparaging description was probably meant for herself, but she forgave him his taunts,—his annoyance was justifiable, she acknowledged; nor would she interrupt him; so she went away again, leaving him to pour out his griefs to his mother.

To avoid Mabel, to whom she did not wish to mention the matter till she had consulted her mother, she quitted the house, and wandered about the park, hardly knowing where she was going.

Feeling tired at last, she sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree. The blue October mist hung like a delicate curtain over the earth, tempering the sun's rays; the undulating ground was splendid with golden bracken, browning into deep orange and tawny red; the redbreast,

"Sweet messenger of calm decay,"

sang his melodious lay, telling to each ear a different tale of love and endurance; the deer came rushing down in a herd to drink at the stream at the foot of the hill. She watched them, as they stood daintily dipping their slender legs in the shallow water, their graceful, antlered heads turned on one side to look at her, ready to start off in timid alarm at the slightest movement.

She had thought so much that her mind was incapable of further effort. Any passing thing could engage her attention now. She followed the smoke of the train as it flew along the line which ran

through the park, instinctively putting her hands to her ears to lessen the sound of the horrible whistle, as it stopped at the Heathfield station.

It recalled her thoughts to her brother's troubles, but she could not concentrate them, and relapsed into idly watching the dappled deer.

As she was thus sitting a gate at the bottom of the park opened, and a man came up the hill. It was Horace Radclyffe, but she did not see him, nor did he at first perceive her. When he did he stopped suddenly. Something in her attitude reminded him of the day he had gone to meet her at the waterfall at Deerscourt, though then she was radiant with all the happy bloom of girlhood, and now the whole figure denoted listlessness and depression. She was pale, too; but nothing could destroy the sweet feminine grace of her whole bearing. She would be as beautiful an old woman as her mother. He tried to force back the comparison that rose involuntarily in his mind between her and his *fiancée*. He meant honestly to be a good husband in spite of the marital ferocity he sometimes meditated, but the contrast would force itself on him.

"Look on this picture and on that." Some men are much more susceptible to grace and beauty than others. He was particularly so, but looked on them, in the present instance, as a luxury beyond his means. He came towards her. The crackling of the bracken startled her, and she looked up.

"Horace!" She was no longer pale. The bright, vivid color flushed her face as the setting sun flushes the evening clouds.

He took her hand. He had not ventured to kiss her for some time past. "Blanche, I'm so glad to meet you here. I did not expect to be so lucky."

"When did you come?"

"Just now. I knew the little gate near the station would be open, so I was going up to the house through the park."

"Are you come to stay?"

"No; I'm going on to London this afternoon, but I wanted to see you to tell you something about myself. I would not let mother or Leila write it." He stopped, as if at a loss how to proceed.

"I think I know, Horace. I heard this morning."

"How, in Heaven's name? Did mother write?"

"No; Ralph told me."

"How on earth did he find out?"

"I don't know; he told me, however. I need not say how sincerely and how truly I wish you every happiness," and she held out her hand.

He had come with some intention of excusing himself in her eyes—how, he hardly knew, but apparently there was no need to do so. She spoke as naturally and with as little embarrassment as if he had been her brother. He could not repress a certain degree of mortification. He had looked on her affection as a thing pertaining to himself of right, and had expected pity and sympathy from her for the disagreeable step forced on him, but he met with nothing of the sort.

"I am sorry Ralph told you, Blanche. I wanted to do so myself, and to explain to you how it is."

"He told me nothing but the bare fact of your engagement."

"You must have wondered I had not written," he said wistfully, as if longing for some mark of regret on her part.

"I concluded you would do so as soon as you had time, and I expected a letter from Aunt Mary to-morrow."

"Blanche, I've thought more about what you would say of it than anything else. You see I'm driven to it in a manner, I'm so devilish hard up. If I had not done something I should have been in Whitecross Street in a week."

He was not the least aware that he was killing the love he was pining for as fast as he could; knocking down and crushing her idol under her very eyes. A look in her face made him say a little bitterly, "I counted on your understanding me, at least."

"I understand you perfectly, Horace, and quite feel the happiness such a match must be to you."

Her face contradicted the satirical import of her words, nevertheless he was disappointed, and she hastened to add warmly, "and if you both enjoy all the blessings I cordially wish you, you will be a very happy pair."

"Thank you, Blanche; you have always been my best friend. You will come to my wedding, won't you? they have bridesmaids and that sort of thing, haven't they?"

She wondered if he had any idea what he was asking.

"Certainly. I am to be one of Leila's bridesmaids too."

"Fancy that match coming off at last!" he said. "I never thought it would. She was awfully cut up when she heard he was drowned. By the by, she told me

something, Blanche, which I hope is not true."

"What?"

Now that he was going to marry himself and could no longer appropriate her without bringing the world about his ears, he would graciously accord her permission to do the same.

"She said you had refused Vivian."

"Well?"

That *well* disconcerted him a little.

"I think it was a mistake if you did."

She drew herself up haughtily. "That is a matter on which I am the best judge."

"Of course; only, intimate as we are, I conceived that I might be allowed to express an opinion. I always hoped you would accept him."

"If you did, you took pains to conceal it," she thought with a feeling of amusement she could not repress. He understood her look.

"I did, Blanche. It would be an unexceptionable settlement for you in every way."

"We won't discuss the subject, if you please."

"Then do you refuse to allow me to consider myself your friend any longer?" he asked, looking injured.

"No, dear Horace; indeed I don't, and never shall, I hope; only on that topic we won't speak."

But it was precisely on that topic he was most anxious to speak. If he could bring that match about, his conscience would be quite relieved. He had never meant to stand in her light, as he termed it, and in Percy's absence made heroic resolutions, which, however, the sight of that aggravating cynic invariably forced him to break. The triumph of monopolizing the only girl whom his enemy cared to speak to was more than human nature could resist. But now that he had put his own neck under the yoke he must give up many pleasant things—Blanche Seymour among them—and though he hated "that snob Vivian" (it is very refreshing to hear the epithets men apply to each other), yet he knew she would be in safe-keeping in his hands. Therefore he was very anxious to speak on that topic.

"Would you be angry if I took a friend's privilege to give you a little advice, Blanche?"

"No, not angry; only let it not be about Mr. Vivian" (decidedly).

"It is about him."

"Then I beg you will say no more."

"Very well, Blanche; but let me just observe that I have always listened to anything you have ever said to me. I was not asking for more than I gave."

She colored.

"Well, Horace; I will hear whatever you wish to say."

"It was this. I should like to see you happily married——"

"It is very kind of you," she remarked a little dryly.

"And Vivian would be a good husband. You would have every chance of happiness with him. He is tremendously fond of you."

"Excuse me, Horace. I don't really see what this leads to. Mr. Vivian is quite content with the answer I gave him."

"That ends it, then. It is only that, I think, you are a little—just a little too high-flown in your notions, sometimes, Blanche. You would be the most perfect wife to *any* man you married."

She thoroughly understood that he meant to urge her to marry a man for whom she had no affection.

"Your opinion of me differs from Ralph's, then," she returned. "He perpetually holds out the threat that no one will ever ask me to be his wife. He thinks a woman who is not the property of one of your noble sex is a very poor sort of affair, indeed, and when I am contumacious confidently predicts a life of celibacy for me."

"Ralph is a——" the rest of the sentence was lost in Colonel Radclyffe's moustache, but she divined it.

"Well, we won't discuss him now. Come home and have some lunch."

"My object in coming here was to see you," he said hesitating. "Must you go in just yet?" The prospect of meeting Mabel was not very agreeable. She had a way of letting him see that she did not think much of him, which was not flattering.

"No; but you will want some lunch, and you would like to see mamma, would you not?"

"I don't want lunch, and I could see your mother later. I should like to talk to you a little longer now. We won't go yet, at any rate."

She did not press the point, dreading Ralph as much as he dreaded Mabel. They talked for a long time, or rather he talked and she listened. Had Miss Tryphena seen them the pangs of jealousy would have driven her mad. He made her acquainted with all his plans, but she

did not reciprocate his confidence;—did not say one word of the family trouble that was looming over her. He noticed her reticence.

"Now, Blanche, tell me about yourself. Mother and Leila will expect a full account of you all when I go back."

"I have told Leila all we've been doing, which is not much."

"I hear Ralph has thrown up his work again."

"Yes, unfortunately."

"How do Davis and Jane get on?" he asked suddenly.

"Very well indeed. They have had their house full, and have some one now even."

"Blanche, one of the things I've been most sorry for is that I made you so angry about that business. I would rather have cut my tongue out than have said a word, if I had thought you would have taken it to heart as you did. I wish you would say you had forgiven me."

That process of "being good" which, as has been before observed, Becky Sharpe pronounced so easy with a good income, was already taking place in Colonel Radclyffe. He felt almost benignant even to Davis, and had that individual had the felicity of serving him at this period, not only would he not have advised his abandoning Jane, but he would probably have given him a handsome present to begin housekeeping on. In reply to his request she held out her hand with a rather sad smile. "Of course, I see now, that with your ideas about things," he went on, "you thought it rascally of me, 'heartlessly cruel,' you said," her reproaches had made a deep impression on him; "but I only did what nine people out of ten would have done; and if Davis did not mean to take my advice, I had no notion he would be fool enough to repeat it to the girl. His doing so put me quite in the wrong box." This view of the case was novel—the last touch was quite worthy of his mother—and Blanche could not forbear smiling.

"Well, all's well that ends well," she returned. "They are married now and happy, apparently."

"I'll go and see them if you like, Blanche." Could masculine complaisance go further? She must have had a heart of stone had she refused to be mollified by such a concession.

They sat talking so long that he had only time for a hurried interview with Mrs. Seymour, and did not see Mabel at all, much to his relief.

"Walk with me across the park to the station," he whispered to Blanche, when it was time for him to go. She did so. He stopped under the large oak near the little gate.

"I suppose this is the last such walk you and I will ever have together. I think, Blanche, you are the best and noblest girl that ever lived. You're the best I ever came across. If things had only been different—but it is no use talking now. Will you say, *God bless you, Horace*, before I go?"

"God bless you, dear Horace, and send you every happiness," she said steadily, in her low, sweet voice.

He wrung both her hands in his, and went away without another word.

She watched him till the train bore him off, and then clasping her hands tightly as if to keep back the heavy tears that rolled slowly down her face, she stood feeling as if her heart were about to break. With all his faults and imperfections, how could she live without him?

The herd of deer, startled by the train, dashed by close to her. They, the oak, the fern, the October sky, would be eternally associated in her mind with that moment's intense misery. The red-dening autumn leaves would fall and die, and waken again to a joyous spring, but her happiness was dead, and would have no second life, for the anticipation of supernal felicity could not afford her consolation while she was only conscious of this dumb, aching despair. If she thought of another world at all it was only as a place where the weary are at rest.

But there was the very mundane, unromantic question of how Ralph was to earn his daily bread waiting to be solved. It would not bear delay, prosaic as it was. She felt she had lost too much time already, and hastened home.

She found her mother and Mabel deep in the subject. Both appreciated her objection to writing the desired letter, but it was evident that Mabel was keenly anxious her brother should get the appointment.

"Is he fit for it, do you think?" asked Blanche.

"Charles says he is; that it is just the thing for him. Very little to do and that little what he can do;—and a good salary."

"Why do they give nine hundred a year for doing very little?"

"Oh, they must have sinecures," said Mabel; "and if Ralph could get this it certainly would be a relief to us all."

Charlie will do all he can to get it for him."

"Did Ralph tell him?"

"Dear, no! and told mamma not to say a word of it, even to me."

"That is nonsense, you know, darling," said Mrs. Seymour; "of course I told Mabel. It is much better to have Charlie's advice."

"Unluckily he has no interest with any one likely to be of use to us about it," sighed Mabel.

"Does Charlie think I could write that letter?" asked Blanche, coloring, and feeling how detestable it was to have her unfortunate love-affairs thus put *en evidence*.

"No; he thinks it would be very disagreeable to you, dear; in fact, that you had better not. He will do all he can himself."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE daily routine of existence must proceed, no matter what private tragedies may be going on in each individual life, or what heavy disaster may be looming over the domestic or national one. Every human being lives two lives:—the one open, palpable, demonstrable—the other secret, inaccessible, inscrutable, known only to Him from whom no secrets are hid. Of this latter our nearest and dearest friend is ignorant, or has but the faintest conception. Those who believe honestly that they share each other's inmost thoughts would stand appalled could they see how large a portion of that mysterious domain, the heart and mind, is mutually unknown to them.

The events last recorded took place on a Saturday, and on Sunday afternoon Blanche started for the walk which was an institution at Heathfield, no outward sign showing that she was perpetually chanting to herself a requiem for the loss of her lover, or that she was torn by conflicting inclinations—the wish to help her brother on the one side, and strong dislike to the only means by which she could do so on the other.

Charles Maynard's hebdomadal walk was as much a part of himself as his hair or eyes. For years he had never missed, when on the paternal acres, going regularly on every returning Sabbath round the home farm, inspecting the stock, paying the farmer's wife a visit, and thence

proceeding to the keeper's to discourse him about the game. It was his weekly recreation. When he brought his bride to Heathfield there was a slight interruption. She was unaware of his custom, and proposed church. Afternoon church was as much a part of her life as this walk was of his.

Had she suggested a voyage to Kam-schatka he would have endeavored, at least, to comply with her request: still the abandonment of his walk was a grievous trial: however, like that gallant old French king who changed his dinner hour from ten to three to suit his young queen's habits, he did not hesitate to sacrifice himself, and set out heroically to endure the forty-five minutes' sermon by which the vicar to whom he had presented the living would reward his kindness.

The one point on which his sisters thought he failed to reach perfection was his persistence in absenting himself from the second service. When, therefore, they saw him walk in on this occasion they hailed the reformation with sisterly rejoicing, and were even willing to hope that his butterfly wife had some sterling qualities. They hastened to offer their congratulations after church.

"We are glad to see, Mabel" (the younger one was spokeswoman as a rule, and answered for the elder to save trouble), "that you have persuaded Charles to come to church in the afternoon. It has always distressed us deeply that he would not do so."

"Does he not always? he has ever since we have been married."

Mrs. Maynard promptly demanded an explanation of her husband.

"Well, I always have gone round the farm instead, dear."

"And why did you not to-day? I could have come to church alone."

"I thought, perhaps, you might not like it. Besides, it is pleasant to have you with me."

"Let us go now, Charlie. There is time." But there was not, for Mrs. Maynard had to refresh herself with tea, and he said it did not signify. "I am sorry, dear boy, you should have missed your walk. I thought you always went to church."

"Well, in London I don't mind going. I have nothing else to do." She commended his motive, and reflected much on the subject during the week. Her conclusion sank her completely in the good opinion of the Miss Maynards.

Henceforth she was, in their eyes, a brand. She had put her hand to the plow and turned back. She resolved to give up afternoon church in the country and to walk with "Charlie, dear fellow! I think he would like to have me with him." Her conduct is merely recorded—not held up for imitation.

On the Sunday in question the party, including Blanche and Mrs. Seymour, were enjoying their walk as usual, when they met Ralph, smoking one of those expensive cigars which so excited his sister's ire.

"Well, dear Ralph," said Mabel, "where are you going?"

"I was going down to speak to Jackson."

"We can go together, then," said Charles. "We are going there too."

As they went along Ralph found fault liberally with everything, and on their encountering the old keeper in his Sunday best coming to meet his master, he reproved him sharply for inattention to some of his orders before Charles could even say his customary, "Well, Jackson, how d'ye do?" The old man could ill brook Ralph's assumption of authority at any time, but before the ladies it affected him deeply. He remarked audibly that "Muster Seymour wur a deal harder to please nor t'Squire," and that for his part he did not understand "them new-fangled ways."

"T'Squire had never found naught amiss with the pheasants."

"Probably not," sneered Ralph.

Charles looked much annoyed, and to change the subject, made some inquiries respecting a dog he had lately bought. Jackson, with much dignity, repudiated all knowledge of the animal, as "Muster Seymour" had taken it from under his jurisdiction and confided it to the care of the under-keeper.

"Why did you do that, Ralph?" asked Charles.

"Jackson has no idea of breaking a dog," was the reply. "It is a farce his attempting it."

The old man entered into a justification of his treatment, and spoke feelingly of the infringement of his rights.

Charles gave vent to a series of groans, as was his wont when disturbed; and turning to Ralph, said that Jackson had always broken the dogs very well, and he should wish Sappho sent back again to him. Ralph became angry, and they had a hot argument on the subject, Charles upholding his old servant's plan, which

his brother-in-law condemned in no measured terms.

"Well, Ralph, be that as it may, let Jackson have the dog back," said he at last in a low voice, and with wonderful amiability considering the provocation he had received.

"Oh, of course, if you choose to spoil a valuable dog it is your own lookout," replied Ralph. "You won't be any the wiser whether it is well or ill broken—that is one thing," he added slightly.

The whole thing had been so sudden that Mabel had not had time to stop it. Mrs. Seymour tried to remonstrate with Ralph, but to no purpose.

Both gentlemen turned away, the one very red, the other pale with anger, and they all walked on in the painful silence which succeeds a quarrel.

"Charlie dear, put down your head, I want to whisper something to you," said his wife. He obeyed with a groan. The whisper consisted of several kisses furtively bestowed, so as not to arouse Ralph's wrath by seeming too decidedly to side against him, and a "don't mind him, darling, for my sake," and then they all walked on again.

They came to a plantation of young fir-trees, and Charles took a key from his pocket and proceeded to open the gate leading in.

"I advise you not to go through here with that dog of Mabel's," said Ralph; "it always runs after the game."

Mabel had a minute toy terrier, the most aggressive, pugnacious little quadruped in Christendom,—audacious enough to face the assaults of all the canine forces in existence—the pride of her life and the torment of her friends. Her husband had given it to her shortly after their marriage, and she had taught it all sorts of tricks, and carried it about under her arm wherever she went, thereby occasioning fierce encounters and warlike demonstrations, for it would with equal indifference challenge the most gigantic mastiff or the meekest spaniel to single combat.

"Your mother is tired, and it is a nearer way home," said Charles, shortly, in answer to Ralph's remark.

"I'm not tired, Charles," "I'll take up Tiny," said Mabel and her mother simultaneously.

"You will disturb the game," repeated Ralph.

Charles paid no attention, but motioned the ladies to go on. Ralph followed, looking immensely disgusted and scornful.

A few minutes, and a rabbit ran across

th. Tiny, on whose susceptibilities
ght acted as a red cloth on a bull,
out of Mabel's arms, and darted
er it with all his small speed.

ere! I told you," cried Ralph.
ay. Tiny!" they all called in chorus,
le heed paid the delinquent.
ever mind," said Charles; "he'll
ack presently."

heasant started up with a loud
and Tiny, abandoning the chase
rabbit, flew after him.

sight was too much for Ralph.
an angry exclamation he seized a
zed stone that lay at his feet and
at the dog, in spite of the "Don't,
of Charles and Mabel. The little
e fell with a loud cry of pain.

, my little dog that Charlie gave
exclaimed Mabel, rushing up to it
t lay, crushed and stunned by the
of the blow. It opened its eyes
to look at her as she took it up.

, Charlie, it is dead, it is dead!"
ed in an agonized voice.

nger was too deep for words. He
e dog out of her arms. "Go home
our mother, dear. I'll take it back
son's, and see what can be done."
sn't much hurt," said Ralph, com-
; "I'm sorry, Mabel; I did not
—,"

ph, how could you? For God's
o away," said his mother.

ke Mabel home," said Charles in a
ee to Mrs. Seymour. The dog was
g piteous moans.

Charlie, must it be killed?" cried

"Let me see if I can't do some-
or it. Oh, my poor little dog!"

me look at it," said Ralph; "it
so much hurt;" but with a fierce,
d oath Charles turned away to go
the keeper's, and the three ladies,
ag and sick, went towards the

s pitiable to see Ralph's face. He
owing Charles, but his mother in-
n his coming with them, dreading
el if the two were left alone.

el, I'm awfully sorry. I did not
.. It is not much hurt—it can't
harles would let me look at it."

lid not answer. She could not.
ut those who have witnessed the
f a pet dog, through an accident,
n an idea of the grief and horror

That cry once heard, is never
n. They all walked on silently,
clinging to Blanche, who was al-
side herself with pity and anger.
got home nearly as soon as they

did, but without the dog. He comforted
Mabel by saying Jackson would do what
he could for it, but he told Blanche it
must be killed. It was so mangled and
crushed, it was hopeless to attempt its
cure. He was very angry, the more so
that he did not say much; and fully con-
vinced that Ralph had done it on purpose,
as he had always disliked the dog. This
was true: the little creature had enter-
tained an instinctive dislike to him, and
invariably barked and snarled if he
touched it or went near it. Nevertheless
he had had no intention of hurting or even
hitting it when he threw the stone, and
was as much horrified and grieved as any
one at what had occurred.

Blanche was convinced of this, but saw
how useless it would be attempt to excuse
him to Charles, yet, at least; especially
as in the course of the evening Mabel,
who was not very strong, became seriously
ill, in consequence of the shock.

She grew rapidly worse, and her hus-
band, almost mad with grief and terror,
openly accused her brother of causing her
death. For three days—days of agonizing,
torturing suspense—her life hung on a
thread. In her delirium she did not know
Charles, and would not let him approach
her, though she kept calling for him in
piteous tones, and wondering he did not
come.

"Where is Charlie? why won't he
come? if he was ill, no one should keep
me from him. Where is Charlie?" The
heart-rending sound never ceased.

Then he would try to make her recog-
nize him, calling her by every endearing
epithet he could think of. In vain. His
presence excited her almost to madness,
and the doctor forbade him the room, add-
ing thereby tenfold to the intensity of his
sufferings.

He rushed into her boudoir, and throw-
ing himself on his knees by the great
chair in which she usually sat, buried his
face in it, crying and sobbing violently.

Blanche, going into the room for some-
thing, found him thus. She tried to
offer some comfort, and at last persuaded
him to come down to the dining-room and
have some wine.

He had had nothing to eat scarcely for
two days.

In the hall they met Ralph, looking
miserable.

"How is she?" he asked.

The sight of him whom he looked on as
the cause of his darling's suffering brought
on one of those violent reactions so well
known to all who have been called on to

witness great grief. His sorrow for the moment gave place to extreme anger, and he overwhelmed Ralph with bitter reproaches—reproaches which, in his calmer moments, would never have passed his lips.

Blanche stood quite appalled, the encounter and the attack were so sudden. Ralph did not utter a word, and Charles, his anger as quickly exhausted as it was fierce, passed on into the dining-room, where she made him eat something. He then went back to his wife's dressing-room to keep watch, and Blanche hastened to look for her brother.

Ever since his sister's illness his remorse had been deep (though at first he was a little inclined to justify his conduct at Charles's expense), and all the attention Blanche could spare from Mabel she gave to trying to comfort him. He neither ate, nor drank, nor slept. Next to his mother, Mabel was the being he loved best in the world, and he would not wittingly have injured a hair of her head. Unwittingly his conduct was a perpetual injury, not only to her, but to every one connected with him. Blanche found him walking up and down his room, an expression of bitter humiliation on his haggard countenance. She could only put her arms round him by way of sympathy; but he repulsed her almost savagely. "How is she?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"How is she?" The answer was always the same. Quite delirious—in a burning fever—did not know any one.

He sat down, and burying his face in his hands, sobbed as violently as Charles had done half an hour before.

As Blanche watched by Mabel that night she made up her mind to write to Percy Vivian. She felt as if her refusal to do so had produced all these misfortunes; and hateful as the thought of appealing to him was, yet in a fit of complete self-abnegation she resolved to do so.

On her mother's taking her place she went to her room and wrote the letter.

Dear Sir—Dear Mr. Vivian—she tried both; then feeling that if she hesitated her courage would fail, she hastily completed the epistle, the wording of which she had partly arranged by her sister's bed, and folding it up, thrust it into an envelope.

The Hon. Percival Vivian.

The words looked unnaturally large to her weary eyes, aching from tears and sleeplessness. She knew no further address, and must send it to Edythe Conway.

She felt inexpressibly humiliated, but

something must be done for Ralph. Some one must help him—and there was little chance of Charles doing so now.

She left the letter on her writing-table, meaning to put it in the post-box the next day, and returned to Mabel's dressing-room to be in readiness in case she was wanted. She did not go back to her own apartment till late the following afternoon, and the first thing she saw was the missive which had cost her so much consideration. She had forgotten all about it in the crisis of her sister's illness, and now, in broad daylight, the exaltation which had impelled her to write it had passed away, and she suddenly felt she could not send it. She tore it up into a hundred fragments, not venturing to look at a word she had written.

Something else must be done for Ralph. She would help him in any other way—but not that.

At the end of the third day the fever subsided and the doctors held out some hope of Mabel's recovery, provided she did not sink from exhaustion. She had recognized her husband, and he was able to sit by her bed, much to his happiness. By care and skill she had literally been rescued from the jaws of death, and was finally pronounced out of danger. The household breathed freely and prepared for a night's rest.

Having seen her mother, who was quite exhausted, safely in bed, Blanche went to Ralph's room to give him a last report. She found his things all packed. He intended leaving by the early train the next day. His sister was out of danger; he had waited to ascertain that, and now he would no longer stay in a house whose owner had so insulted him. He spoke bitterly.

She threw her arms round him, in despair at his look and tone.

"Oh, don't go, darling! Charlie did not know what he was saying. He was wild with grief. Where can you go? What can you do?"

"God knows," he answered dejectedly; "every one and everything go against me. I won't stay here, that's all."

"Oh, darling Ralph, don't go just yet. Where can you go? There is no one in London. Wait a day or two, till Mabel is a little better."

She drew his face down and covered it with kisses.

"It is all very well to kiss me like that, Blanche. The letter I asked you to write would have been a better proof of your affection."

"Oh, Ralph, I did try to write it. I did once, but I could not send it. Can't you see, darling, that I could not?"

"Well, I suppose not, according to your romantic notions, if you don't mean to marry the fellow, though God knows what you intend to do if you won't. Such chances don't fall in a girl's way every day. However, that is your lookout. There is no driving sense into a woman."

Her misery was extreme. He had no money, neither had her mother. What would become of him? how was he to live? The Riverses were abroad, so she had not even the resource of writing to Geoffrey to look after him. To what might he not be driven by temptation, alone in London without resources? "Have you any money, dear?" she asked, her hand still on his shoulder.

"Enough to take me to town; no more. Have you any?"

"Only a few shillings, and mamma has none, I know. How can you go without any? Wait here, do, darling, till mamma can write to Uncle Rivers; or I will write to Geoffrey if you prefer it."

"No; nothing will induce me to stay under Maynard's roof now my sister is safe."

Her attempts at persuasion were vain, and she finally gave them up.

"I shall be back in a minute," she said then; "I just want to fetch something."

She returned with a small case in her hand, containing a diamond and emerald brooch, locket, and bracelet—the only valuable jewelry she was possessed of, and they had only lately been left her by her godmother, or they would probably have shared the fate of the other Seymour property.

"Ralph, I have brought you these. I have no money, but they will do as well."

His face brightened. His need was too pressing to let him refuse. "Blanche, you are a good girl," he said, kissing her. "That is a great relief. I can get enough on them to give me time to look round, and they will be quite safe. You shall have them again before Christmas."

She went to bed with comparatively a light heart. At least he would have money to provide him with food for the present, though he muddled away his resources so, that he would be penniless again in a week.

The following morning she wrote a full account of her troubles to her trusty ally, Geoffrey, consulting him about the matter of the letter—though, had his judgment

differed from her instinct, she would not have acted on it—and urgently entreating his advice.

Geoffrey was, or ought to have been, competent to give counsel respecting ne'er-do-weel brothers. Emily's eldest one, Tom Peyton, was a constant trial to him and her.

The daughters of the horse-leech, who cry "Give, give," are moderate in their demands compared to these fine gentlemen whose talents are too great for the ordinary occupations of their sex.

CHAPTER LIV.

MABEL recovered her strength slowly. Almost her first inquiry had been for her brother.

"He is gone to London, dear, to see about something to do," said Blanche, to whom her question was addressed.

"Has he any money?" was the next inquiry.

"Yes, dear."

"How did he get it?" asked the sister anxiously. "Did Charlie give him any?"

To satisfy her, Blanche had to explain how he had been supplied. Mabel burst into tears. We are ill and on the brink of eternal rest—almost carried off by the true friend who comes to set us free—and by skill and incalculable care and love we are snatched from his arms and sweet forgetfulness, and black care takes her place by our pillow again, and our weary hearts long for the unconsciousness which had mercifully dulled our senses for the time and rendered our minds a blank.

"Blanche, I hate myself," said Mabel, "when I think how I am surrounded by every luxury and comfort, and see mamma and you and Ralph torn by anxiety, and now you obliged to give up your poor little jewels."

"My dearest, I ought to be thankful I had them to give. I shall have them back again all in good time, when poor Ralph gets settled."

Dreading the effect of excitement on her, Blanche spoke far more encouragingly and confidently than she felt; but was it wonderful that when Charles came in he found his wife feverish? What care or medicine can keep out the stinging arrows of uneasiness for those we love?

"Cure her of that." Alas! alas! how many a tender nurse has longed in vain

"for some sweet oblivious antidote
To cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?"

"I have brought you some late roses, my dearest," said her husband, bending over her. "Why, how flushed and hot you are again! Has she been talking, Blanche? My darling, you must keep quiet."

He sat down by her to keep guard himself. But he could not guard the issues of the heart or still the restless thoughts busy there. Had her husband and brother quarreled?

She asked Blanche the moment she was alone with her.

"No." Blanche could safely say they had not done that. It takes two to make a quarrel, and Ralph had not answered a word. She carefully avoided all mention of those reproaches which made her sick whenever she thought of them. Whether Charles remembered them or not she could not tell. He hardly spoke of Ralph at all.

Meantime Mr. Seymour was making the lives of all those luckless individuals who have places to bestow or interest to procure, a continual torment to them; but hitherto his importunity had not succeeded in wearying anything but promises out of them. His situation was becoming critical when Geoffrey sent a timely "benevolence," which kept him afloat a little longer, and old Mr. Rivers, in spite of a hundred vows to the contrary, came to the rescue of his graceless nephew.

Blanche and her mother drank to the dregs the cup of bitter humiliation prepared for them by the hand of him who ought according to theory—a theory which so many women find to be theory and nothing more—to have been their support and comfort. Mabel spent a few days in London on her way to Brighton, and Ralph finally allowed himself to be persuaded to dine with her in Grosvenor Square, having first put her almost into a nervous fever by refusing to do so. Charles met him as if nothing had happened, and she gladly seized the excuse of the drawing-room being *en papillotte* to sit all the evening in the dining-room, whereby she was enabled to keep guard over her mankind herself and ward off dangerous topics.

Leila Radclyffe was to be married in December, and her parents came to London from Cowes to prepare for that happy event. Miss Thomas was coming up from Wales for the express purpose of being presented to her future connections, and

Mrs. Radclyffe was in a state bordering on distraction from fear that her husband would not like his daughter-in-law. She put herself out of the question. She would make it her business to like her. At all events, she would make the best of her, after the manner of those excellent conservatives who, seeing that the ballot is inevitable, console themselves under adverse circumstances by opining that it will work in their favor.

She engaged the Seymours to dine on the evening of her arrival, in order that "dear Blanche" might make a diversion in case things did not go smoothly.

"I have asked Fanny Seymour and Blanche to come to-night, dear Horace," she had said to her son; "I thought it would be pleasanter. You see, Leila will be taken up with dear George."

"All right, mother," had returned her warrior, feeling how grateful at that moment would be a sudden command to join his regiment, ordered on foreign service. But he would have to meet Blanche at some time or other—he had asked her to be present at his wedding, and people whose inclinations would keep them as far apart as the poles have to encounter each other in society without wincing.

When Blanche and her mother reached the hotel where the Radclyffes were staying, no one was in the drawing-room but Mr. Radclyffe. He burst forth at once, "How d'ye do, Mrs. Seymour? Well, Blanche, how are you? Have you seen this lady Colonel Radclyffe does us the honor of presenting to us? She is the ugliest woman I ever saw! She had a duenna with her, and, by George! I mistook, and welcomed the wrong one! The duenna is rather handsome, and, of course, I spoke to her. I could not believe a son of mine would take up with such a mad-looking thing as the other woman is! Have you seen her, Blanche?"

"Yes; I met her at Lady Glennorth's."

"Did you ever see such a creature? She looks as if she had just escaped from a lunatic asylum, with her hair all down her back! And what the deuce makes her take a duenna about with her? Does she think any one will want to look at her? She needn't be uneasy, I'm sure. If a man did by chance look once, I'll be hanged if he would a second time."

"You see your son is of a different opinion," remarked Mrs. Seymour.

Mr. Radclyffe gave expression to an expletive which, though perhaps excusable under the circumstances, will hardly bear recording.

Mrs. Radclyffe and Leila now appeared, followed by Miss Thomas and the lady appurtenance whose presence Mr. Radclyffe so strongly deprecated.

The United Kingdom was undergoing the throes of a general election, and Miss Tryphena, true to her colors, was attired in bright orange.

Mrs. Radclyffe looked very nervous, as if she had been undergoing much, and Leila had relapsed into her sea-anemone condition. Mr. Radclyffe's face was a study. He had been lectured and exhorted to behave well by his wife, and in a less degree by his daughter, who condescended to remonstrate with him out of deference to her mother's entreaties, but his astonishment and disgust were almost more than he could contain.

"Did you ever see such a thing?" he whispered almost audibly to Blanche, as the heiress, gorgeous in amber and gold, her hair pendant, bounced—for Miss Thomas cannot be said to have walked—into the room. All her movements were a series of jerks. There was no repose about her.

"My dear," said Mrs. Radclyffe nervously, "allow me to introduce you to Miss Seymour. I dare say you have often heard dear Horace speak of her."

Miss Thomas jerked her head and eyed Blanche deliberately from head to foot.

"Oh, so you are Blanche Seymour, are you?" she remarked in the snappish way peculiar to her. She spoke through her teeth, putting prefixes to all her words, and rolling her r's so as to set one's teeth on edge. She called Horace "Colonel Er-r-r-radclyffe" in a way that made him hate his own name.

"Yes," replied Blanche meekly, and coloring deeply at having her identity thus called in question before every one.

"Colonel Radclyffe is always talking of you," continued the lady, still looking at her. "I have been very curious to see you. You are not the least like what he told me. He said you were beautiful."

"You don't agree with him, evidently," returned Miss Seymour amused.

"You have a nice face—I like it—but it is not beautiful. I have seen you somewhere before. I never forget any one I have once met."

"I had the pleasure of seeing you at Lady Glennorth's ball."

"Ah! Then that is where I saw you. You were dancing with Percy Vivian. You are *journalière*, then. You were beautiful that night."

Fortunately Sir George came in and made a diversion.

"Is she not dreadful?" said Leila to Blanche in a low voice. "I shall never forget her introduction to papa!"

"Are they staying at the hotel with you?"

"Yes. Papa came in just after their arrival, and took Miss —, that lady who is with her, for Horace's intended, and it was so awkward! I can never feel like a sister to her, and George has gone on so that I can't look at her without laughing."

The dinner passed off without any *contre-temps*. Mr. Radclyffe was "good" and—well, not amusing. In fact, he was overwhelmed at the magnitude of the misfortune that had befallen him in having such an addition to his family.

Miss Thomas (much to her future lord's surprise and delight) was quiet, and occupied, when not engaged on the final cause of dinners—in watching Blanche.

Mrs. Radclyffe congratulated herself on her wisdom in having invited the Seymours, and Horace breathed a prayer of thankfulness to his patron saint when the ladies rose to leave the room. His sensations were not enviable. Knowing the critical propensities of his belongings, he had a painful knowledge of the dissection to which his *fiancée* would presently be subjected. For the time he hated Sir George Conway. It is true that gentleman behaved in the most exemplary manner. Not a muscle of his face moved. Not a twinkle of his blue eyes betrayed that anything unusual was taking place, yet his gravity aggravated Horace more almost than the most convulsive laughter would have done.

In the drawing-room Miss Thomas accosted Blanche abruptly. "I think if Colonel Radclyffe had talked about you as much before we were engaged as he has since I should not have accepted him."

Blanche was overwhelmed. "We have known each other for a long time," she said by way of excuse.

"Do you know what I was thinking at dinner?" Miss Thomas was still looking at her very intently.

"No."

"I was wondering why you and Colonel Radclyffe were not married, as he admires you so much."

"People who like each other enough to marry don't usually talk about each other," said Blanche gently.

"That is true" (ter-rue, she pronounced it); "besides, he wanted money, but I tell

you I was getting quite jealous of you. Perhaps I sha'n't be now I've seen you."

This gratifying conversation was meant to be private, but owing to the shrillness of Miss Thomas's voice her part of it, at least, was painfully audible.

Mrs. Radclyffe, that evening, discovered the first flaw in her future son's character. He felt at liberty now to indemnify himself for his good behavior during dinner by making remarks of so reprehensibly ludicrous a nature to Leila and Blanche that those young ladies were convulsed with laughter. Mrs. Radclyffe secretly resolved on a lecture to her daughter for not keeping her lover in better order, instead of encouraging him by being amused at his sallies. "If I had encouraged Charles in all the nonsense he talks there would be no living with him," she said to herself angrily. A little wholesome encouragement might have had a good effect on Charles sometimes.

"Say, lovely Tory, what the jest
Of wearing orange on thy breast,
When that same breast, betraying, shows
The whiteness of the rebel rose?"

repeated Sir George, seating himself beside Miss Radclyffe. "Shall I go and say that to her, Leila? Only I don't see the whiteness, so, perhaps, it would not be appropriate. The color of her dress matches her complexion admirably, I think,—don't you?"

Blanche, unable to listen to him with any sort of gravity, fled, but it was to be met by Mr. Radclyffe with renewed expressions of surprise at his son's taste, which even the lady's ample tocher did not excuse, in his opinion.

"My dear, she is not a lady," was Mrs. Radclyffe's whispered comment to Mrs. Seymour. "How shall I get on with her if they live at Deerscourt, as Charles wants Horace to do, or did till to-night. I'm sure I don't know what he will say to it now."

"You will find it turn out better than you think," said Mrs. Seymour encouragingly. "She is evidently very fond of Horace, and that goes a long way."

In fact, the impression she and Blanche carried away with them was that, extraordinary as Miss Thomas undoubtedly was, and little prospect of happiness as such a match apparently afforded, it would yet not be as wretched as was to be expected. She was devotedly attached to her handsome suitor. Horace was one of those men gifted with the power of winning the love of women without almost any effort on their own part—a power possessed frequently by the least

worthy men. Women's traducers say this is because the sex is incapable of esteeming what is intrinsic—is won by outward graces or satisfied with a low standard of excellence. This is one view. A *tu quoque* answer would be—How many men sacrifice everything for a pretty face! Are the best and noblest women ever really appreciated by them?

But may it not be, too, that by the law of compensation the men inherently weak and worthless are given the power of winning the love which will cleave to them and help them when all else fails? Be this as it may, it was plain that Miss Thomas had given her heart into Horace's keeping, and was already softer and less angular for the transfer. "Love is a great thing, yea, a great and thorough good: by itself it makes everything that is heavy, light; and it bears evenly all that is uneven. For it carries a burden that is no burden, and makes everything that is bitter sweet and tasteful. Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller nor better in heaven and earth; because love is born of God."

Whether Horace would turn this mighty engine to good account, or let it feed on itself and finally transform itself to bitterness, was another thing.

"There is something likable and frank about her, in spite of her oddity and vulgarity," was Blanche's comment to her mother.

On their return they found Ralph and Geoffrey awaiting them. The former put a letter into his mother's hand. It was from Lord —— himself, nominating him to the appointment he had so much desired.

Mr. Seymour did not deem any position above his deserts, but he did condescend to express some surprise at this announcement, as he had long since given up all hope of obtaining the post, having heard on good authority that it had been given to a personal friend of Lord ——'s. There was no hint in the letter as to whose interest had procured it for him.

"I suppose you did not write to Vivian?" said he to his sister.

"No; not a word."

They lost themselves in conjectures, but to no purpose, and Ralph finally decided that a conviction of his merits had alone induced the authorities to appoint him. The belief was pleasing to him, and did not particularly hurt any one.

A load was lifted off Blanche's mind.

felt so guilty through all those trial! Now she could sleep with ease.

Under whose doing it is, Geof?" to her cousin the following day. Not so convinced of her brother's he was himself.

Think Vivian's, if you ask me. It must have been some powerful in-work, as I heard Hardinge was told."

Can Mr. Vivian have heard of any?"

Not easily enough. Through the , perhaps;—and he is just the man to do the thing quietly and himself appear."

Alph will only keep it, now he

think he will keep this. There is to do, and he can ride any amount of horses in connection with it. He will be of drawing his salary!"

Why, there are some things for which one feels one cannot thank God and this is one of them. I wonder Alph will ever repay you the money you have lent him! I wish I had some, that I might do it!"

CHAPTER LV.

WON COURT had been subjected to renovation and embellishment for the gratification of its mistress, and now it was full of visitors to assist at the marriage at Deerscourt. Lord and Lady Annorth were there, and Percy. The knowledge that she would have to encounter the latter was the dread with which Blanche met the visit she and her mother refused to pay the Radclyffes.

Won Court was full to overflowing. The garden (Mabel was quite herself) and in the possession of a dog more aggressive and troublesome, than the lamented Tiny—acquired by the devoted Charlie with expense and trouble), Ralph Seymour Riverses;—Leila having par-requested Geoffrey to assist at the wedding of the Sea-Anemone. Mrs. Seymour had to request Lady Eveleigh to do house-room to some of her

"I hate it all!" said Leila when Blanche were sitting together on

the night of the latter's arrival. "Why can't it be done quietly, instead of offering one up in public in this way?"

"It is your recantation, dear," said Blanche laughing. "After all your protests, it is necessary to show you are not ashamed of what you are doing!"

"When I told George how I hated it all, he asked me if I was ashamed of marrying him. I am not; but this fuss is too detestable! It makes me feel like one of those animals decked out with garlands for a sacrifice."

"But I hope, dear, you are confident and happy as to your prospects;—that you have no such fears now as you used to have."

"Blanche, I can hardly tell you how I feel about it. If it did not vex George and make him unhappy, I would rather not marry now. I told him so, one day."

"And what did he say?"

"I don't think he believed it;—at least, he considered it nonsense and began to chaff me, and then when he saw I was in earnest, he was quite hurt. Of course I know I must go on now; but it is all so horrid! Mamma's friends lecture me and tell me what I'm to do to keep up my influence over him. I'm to be very down at first, and make him believe I think all he says and does perfect, so as to secure my own way afterwards! The whole thing seems to me so degrading!"

"That would be treating him like a fool," said Blanche.

"So I told Aunt Kate, and she said, 'My dear, all men are fools in that way. You have only to make them fancy you think them very fine fellows—very superior, and so on, and play humble yourself, and you can twist them round your finger.' Do you think that is true, Blanche? it is so dreadful!"

"Perhaps it may be of some men, but only of an inferior sort."

"But would you act yourself as Aunt Kate advises me?"

Miss Seymour's small nose and lip curled in unison.

"I would not insult any man I married, by doing so; I could not stoop to such a course. I should not ask him to do anything he thought wrong, and if he would not do what I wished because it was right, I should scorn to use that underhand sort of influence."

"So should I. Besides, I could not do it if I tried. I never could flatter any one: but when they all talk to me about the various arts and devices I'm to use to keep up my influence I feel quite dis-

heartened at the idea of passing my life in the practice of such deceit."

"I would not do it," said Blanche determinedly. "Influence so acquired would not be worth keeping. I would rather quarrel with my husband honestly fifty times over. What an idea of men your Aunt Kate must have!"

"It isn't only Aunt Kate. Mamma says much the same thing, and nearly all the married ladies who talk to me."

"Mabel wouldn't," said Blanche indignantly, "nor Emily Rivers. And I'm sure mamma would not."

"No, I know they would not. Still you don't wonder I feel frightened, or that I think one of the blessings of heaven is that there they neither marry nor are given in marriage."

"Poor Sir George!" said Blanche. "I wonder if he is thinking the same thing?"

"That last remark was made in the abstract," explained Leila laughing. "I don't mind confessing to you, Blanche, that when I am with George I forget my fears: it is only when I'm alone and think over it all that I dislike it so."

The two young ladies were sitting in Leila's room, their hair down over their shoulders. There was a great display of brushes, which, however, they were not using, but supporting their respective chins on their hands and gazing intently into the fire.

"How do you get on with Miss Tryphena?" asked Blanche suddenly after a long pause.

"Don't ask me. She is insupportable!"

"And she and Uncle Charles?"

"Blanche, I shall yet live to see my father vote for the Radical candidate, and to accompany my mother to hear Dr. Pusey preach," said Leila impressively.

"Homœopathy," laughed Blanche. "Like cures like. Why don't you tell her to put up her hair, Leila?"

"Because she wouldn't, if I did. Besides, I never interfere with her."

"Poor Horace looks so agonized when she comes floating in."

"Serves him right. Why does he marry such a creature?"

"You are very wrong, Leila. He is your brother, and you ought to make the best of her. She is very fond of Horace, and wishes to please him, I'm sure. She would put up her hair if she thought he would like it, I'm convinced."

"She never wished to please any one but herself in her life."

"I don't agree with you. She is very

kind and considerate to that lady who lives with her."

"Who is twice as nice as she is. She serves as a sort of foil to her. George wants to know if Horace is to marry the pair."

Miss Thomas had come to Deerscourt to be one of Leila's bridesmaids. Among her numerous peculiarities was that of taking violent fancies to people and imparting to them with great frankness her opinion of their perfections, and informing them of the points in which she would like to resemble them, though she expressed her admiration in such jerky, spasmodic fashion, and so openly, that it sounded almost like an insult.

She had conceived one of these sudden friendships for Blanche, and told her freely exactly what she thought of her mental and personal qualifications. Blanche determined to turn this to account, and one day, when Miss Thomas was descanting on the beauty of her (Blanche's) head, she said, "Why don't you do your hair the way I do?"

"Oh!" shrieked the lady, "I wouldn't for the world. You wear false hair."

"No, I don't, indeed," said Blanche.

"You wear frizettes."

"Yes; but that is not wearing false hair."

"I wouldn't put one in my hair for the world. There is nothing men hate so much."

"I shouldn't mind that. Men have not long hair, so they can't be competent judges of what is needed to dress it; unless, indeed, they happen to be hair-dressers, and then they recommend frizettes."

"I hear men object to all the false padding and stuff women put on their heads."

"Is it not very uncomfortable to have your hair always hanging about your face?" asked Blanche, not heeding the last remark.

"No. Besides, I like what is true and natural."

"It would be just as natural if you had it done like Leila's or mine. Leila wears no frizettes at all, and Horace always admires her hair."

"Did Colonel Er-r-radclyffe say he did not admire mine like this?" asked Miss Thomas even in a shriller voice than usual.

"No, of course not; but I have often heard him say he thought curls untidy."

"That can't be. He would have told me so."

"I wish you would let me try how

you would look with your hair plaited up."

"No; I won't. I have always worn it this way, and always shall."

Blanche was baffled. This was in the morning. In the afternoon, when Horace came in from shooting, he went into the library and found his *financée* there writing letters.

"Well," said he, going up to her, "how have you been getting on? Have you been out?"

"No. How could I? it has been raining. Sit down; I want to speak to you." It sounded very judicial, and he felt alarmed.

"What is it?" and he drew a chair to the table.

"Do you dislike my wearing my hair in curls?"

Had a shell fallen at his feet he could not have been more amazed, and would not have been half so much frightened.

"Not if you like to do so, of course," he said, with a slight hesitation. The answer was true in one way. Till he was fairly married his dislike was not overt to anything it pleased her to do.

"Never mind what I like. Would you rather I wore my hair twisted up like your sister's, or mixed with false hair like Miss Seymour's?"

"I don't think Blanche wears false hair," said he, more to gain time than from any wish to defend his cousin.

"I call it false; she calls it a frizette. You haven't answered my question."

"Well, Polly, I like your hair any way you wear it, of course; but if you ask me which I really prefer—why, I confess, I should like it done like Leila's—for example."

"And why didn't you tell me so yourself, instead of getting Miss Seymour to do it?"

"I give you my sacred word of honor I never spoke about your hair to Blanche, or Leila either," he exclaimed eagerly. It would be a fearful misfortune if Miss Thomas, in a fit of jealousy, broke off the match.

"Didn't you? Well, I thought you did, because Miss Seymour told me to-day that you said curls were untidy. I am glad you did not. Tell me yourself what you dislike, always, and I'll alter it if I can. I will get my maid to put my hair up in some way this evening."

Nothing could make Miss Thomas's voice otherwise than harsh, or her manner otherwise than jerky, but her face softened into tenderness as she spoke, and Horace

was very much touched. It may be said that it was the first time he had felt anything approaching to affection for the woman he intended shortly to marry. He put his arm round her and kissed her. "Thank you, Polly. That is really kind of you. I shall like your hair better put up, certainly, but how could you think I should speak to Blanche about it?"

"Well—never mind—I did think so, and I didn't like it; but you say you didn't, so there's an end of it. You will find me very open, Colonel Radclyffe. I never keep a suspicion on my mind. I always come out with it."

"Why don't you call me Horace, Polly? Colonel Radclyffe sounds very formal."

"Because you never told me to do so."

"No; you never told me to call you Polly, but I do, of course."

"Well, I'll call you Horace for the future."

Colonel Radclyffe left the room feeling less like that traveler tied to a lunatic for a long journey than he had ever since his engagement.

Miss Tryphena appeared in the evening with her hair neatly braided, a change which completely metamorphosed her. She no longer presented that Mænad-like appearance which had formerly characterized her, but, as she still eschewed all the aids of art,—unassisted nature in the shape of very tight plaits, closely twisted round her head, which was not classically shaped, gave her rather the look of a parrot, her nose being prominent—or of one of those Dutch dolls, the delight of feminine childhood, whose simulated hair, though carefully painted black, gives such a strong impression of baldness. But her motive was beyond all praise, and Horace hastened to compliment her highly.

After dinner, as Blanche was going upstairs to fetch some music, she met him.

"Where are you going? can I get you anything, Blanche?" he asked.

"No, thanks; I'm only going for some music."

He turned back with her. "Blanche, I want to thank you for the hint you gave—Polly about her hair."

There is no harm in the name Polly. On the contrary, it is a very good name, and many excellent women have been so called; still he never pronounced it without hesitation—almost shame;—it sounded incongruous, somehow, among the Leilas and Blanches and Edythes to which he was used. He could not imagine his sister or cousin as Polly.

"She looks better with it up, doesn't

she?" answered Blanche, smiling. "But she was like the man in the parable who 'afterwards repented and went,' for she refused my advice at first."

"She asked me how I liked it done, and said she would alter anything I objected to. Don't you think that is very amiable of her, Blanche?" He looked anxiously at her, as if longing for some word of comfort.

"Indeed, I do, Horace. I don't well see what more any one could do."

"Blanche, do you like her?"

"Yes, I do. I think she has an immense deal to like in her; besides, I should be very ungrateful if I did not, she is so fond of me, apparently."

"It would be very odd if she was not. I should like you to be her friend always, Blanche, as you have been mine." Then the music being found, they went downstairs.

Blanche was standing in the drawing-room at Deerscourt in all the glory of her bridesmaid's attire during the wearisome interval between the religious and festive portion of the proceedings by which Leila Radclyffe was made Lady Conway. Percy Vivian, who had come to assist at his friend's benediction, was at the other end of the apartment, looking older and graver and more out of character with the place and occasion than ever. The two were fully conscious of each other's presence. That they would have to meet on this day was the thought which had chiefly occupied the minds of both during the preceding week. Percy, after turning some books carelessly over on a table near him, went suddenly up to Blanche. He had neither spoken to her nor seen her since the moment he had taken her back to the ball-room in his brother's house. He could not resist the desire to speak to her now, though he had no hope of changing her resolution. But he would be near her, at least for a little while.

"How do you do, Miss Seymour? I am very glad, indeed, to see you again." He shook hands warmly.

"How do you do?" she returned in a low voice; "I am glad to see you safe after the perils of that dreadful yachting expedition."

"Did you give me a thought when you heard the report?" he asked, fixing his eyes on her for a second.

"Indeed I did; a great many, and grieved for you sincerely," she answered with that frankness which was one of her charms in his eyes.

"It was a very near thing at one time.

I never was out in such a storm! George's seamanship saved us, under Providence. When it was at the worst and there seemed but little hope of our weathering it, your image, Lady, and the thought of all you have been to me, never left my mind." He spoke in an impassioned voice, forced to do so by an impulse stronger than he could control.

She colored deeply, and looked down distressed. "I am very glad you are safe home," she answered, with embarrassment. Then, after a pause, "Mr. Vivian, I have just heard that it is to you my brother owes his appointment. I feel perfectly unable to express my sense of your kindness——"

"Pray, don't speak of it. It cost me nothing, and your brother is a very fit man."

"But I must thank you. I have only just been told the circumstances by Lord Darsy, Leila's cousin. We could not conceive to whom Ralph owed his success. How did you know anything of it? he did not write to you?"

"No; I happened to be with Lord —— when he got a letter on the subject. He named your brother as one of the candidates, and I merely said I considered him a very suitable person. You see, there is no obligation."

"But there is the greatest. You can hardly know how anxious we were that he should succeed. I really——"

"May I entreat you to say no more? The feeling that I have been of some little use to you is ample compensation for anything I may have done."

He made light of it, but the truth was he had taken considerable trouble about it. He had been informed by Sir George of her refusal to write to him; Ralph, who had always been confidential with Leila, having told her with many lamentations over his sister's unkindness, and she, of course, had told her lover: but of this Mr. Vivian said nothing to Blanche. The two stood silent for some minutes, till there was a general move to the dining-room.

"May I take you in?" he asked; and she could not refuse his arm. "You look like a bride yourself," he remarked, smiling a little, and looking down at her as they went along.

"Not quite," she returned; "a bride is all in white generally."

"And are not you? you look so to me. I am grieved to see you looking pale, though. Have you been quite well?"

"Yes, thanks; but my sister has been ill and we have had a good deal of anxiety

in many ways. How happy and pleased Edythe looks, does she not?" she added, to turn the conversation away from herself.

"Yes; she is rejoicing in George's happiness. That reported accident was a good thing for him, as it turned out. It taught the young lady to know her own mind."

"Yes; but it was so dreadful! Poor Edythe was nearly frantic!"

"George is fortunate, to be the object of so much devotion," he said a little bitterly. She could not help coloring, feeling the implied reproach. She could have told him how large a part he had in Edythe's tears—how he was passing by the love ready to be lavished on him, vainly striving for what could never be his—what an aching heart Edythe carried beneath her smiling face; but the womanly instinct which made her hide her own feelings from all human view—or strive to do so—made her equally loyal to her friend.

"Your friends grieved deeply for you, Mr. Vivian. I heard that Lord Glennorth was almost beside himself."

He looked at her for a moment—a look that said plainly, "I did not want their tears alone."

"I am quite aware that I am not one of those favored individuals who are calculated to inspire enthusiastic liking," he answered, somewhat irrelevantly.

"I think Sir George's and Edythe's affection for each other is the most beautiful thing I ever saw," said Blanche. "Only that she is so entirely unselfish, she would feel his marriage as a great loss to herself."

"She told me she looked on it not as losing a brother, but as gaining a sister," said Percy.

"Don't you admire her?" asked Blanche eagerly.

"I don't think her beautiful, if you mean that; but I admire her independence of character and unselfishness. I have always done so—even before you taught me to honor all women in yourself," and he smiled a little.

And Edythe, meanwhile, sat on the other side of the table, trying not to feel limp from being utterly bored by Lord Darsy, on whom had devolved the task of taking her in to breakfast and providing her with chicken and small talk. The first he did very well. In the latter he failed completely, not from any deficiency in the article in himself, but because she was incapable of being entertained. A fascination which she could not master drew her eyes constantly to

that part of the table where Percy Vivian sat absorbed in Blanche. She had not seen him since his return from the Continent, till he had gone down to Leighton Court a day or two before the wedding. She then was almost afraid to congratulate him on his escape. So deeply did she feel, that every word she spoke seemed weighted with an undue significance. She had such a dread of saying too much that her manner was cold—so cold that he noticed it, for she had always been frank with him as with a brother. He attributed it to her excessive absorption in her brother. He concluded that she had thought so much of him, that no one else had any share in her anxiety. He gave her every detail of the voyage of the *Leila*, from the time of their leaving Cowes, dwelling with pride on Sir George's skill in the management of the yacht, and on his presence of mind in the midst of overwhelming danger. He told the whole story without one thought of how her heart had been well-nigh broken for him, and the uses of the world seemed to her flat and unprofitable to the last degree.

She listened now in weariness to all the dull platitudes which form an integral part of a wedding breakfast; to the Benedicts who regretted, no doubt with the infinite sympathy of their wives, that they were no longer eligible, and to the bachelors who paid vapid compliments to the bridesmaids, who were all exhorted to follow the bride's example as speedily as possible. To her relief, Percy did not make a speech. There was a depth of degradation to which he could not stoop. His friend might call him his *best-man* if it so pleased him, but nothing would induce him to get up and propose a toast in which Blanche Seymour could, in the most remote way, be connected with those eleven young ladies who sat smiling inanely at speeches, intended to be facetious, and succeeding only in being dull.

At length Sir George and Lady Conway took their departure amid a shower of old shoes. Mrs. Radclyffe thought it *de rigueur* to shed a few tears, but she "wiped them soon," and received very complacently the congratulations of all her friends. Yet, in spite of her little worldlinesses, the prayers she offered up for her child's happiness were sincere and heartfelt.

"I pray God she may be happy; I am sure he will be good to her; and no one knows, dear Fanny, the relief it is to me to see her married," was her remark that night to Mrs. Seymour.

CHAPTER LVI.

MRS. RADCLYFFE had quite come to the conclusion that her son Horace's engagement to Miss Thomas was the greatest misfortune of her life. She had known many trials, but this exceeded them all. Like Oberon and Titania, her husband and his future daughter-in-law never met

"In grove or green,
By fountain clear or spangled, star-lit sheen,
But they did square."

Had they confined their "squarings" to such remote spots all would have been well, but the domestic hearth or the festive board was the usual scene of their disputes, and she and Horace sat in perpetually-increasing alarm as the pair warmed mutually to the combat,—the gentleman almost choking himself by the flow and force of his words;—his ideas, or what he took for such, being so much more rapid than his power of expressing them, while the lady, her face gradually waxing redder and hotter, endeavored to overwhelm him by her volubility and the vehemence of her arguments, her voice getting shriller in proportion as his style became more objurgative.

Mrs. Radclyffe hardly knew which she dreaded most,—politics or religion. They were more violent over politics; for Mr. Radclyffe, now that he was matched with an ultra-Tory, became almost republican in the views he enunciated, and was for pulling that time-honored edifice the British Constitution down about our ears; but, though they were quieter in their religious discussions, she was shocked equally by her husband's profanity and by the *sang froid* with which Miss Thomas consigned all who differed from the strictest sect of Evangelicals to eternal perdition. Mrs. Radclyffe would have preferred not being driven into a corner as to the ultimate fate of Roman Catholics. She eschewed them and their doctrines, and had a holy horror of any sacred music even, save the old, orthodox tunes through the medium of which the public was familiarized with Tate and Brady; but she was content to leave the subject in a merciful cloud of uncertainty: and whatever might finally befall the worshipers of the Scarlet Lady, it was unchristian in the extreme, she felt, to condemn sweepingly all those excellent Protestants who only went so far on the road to Rome as to indulge in a little innocent dance, or suffer a few floral decorations in church at Christmas and Easter

time. She felt this especially, now that she had a son-in-law of decidedly High Church proclivities. Could such a paragon do wrong? and had he not restored Leighton Church, and erected therein a stone altar and a stone pulpit? Had he not presented it with an organ, and been active in the formation of a choir composed of small boys who sang like angels, and who looked on him as the *acme* of human perfection?

"Poor little men!" She could not see, after all, that hearing them sing "Oh, come, all ye faithful" on Christmas eve—one white-headed, white-robed, soulless epitome of manhood taking the *solo*, and transporting his hearers to heaven, he unconscious the while of the effect he was producing—could do any one harm. She was sure, even, that it did Charles good. That graceless reprobate had gone to church on Christmas eve to spite Miss Thomas, who esteemed it a Papistical observance so to do; but having gone to scoff he remained to pray, or at least to feel softened, and forget the amiable motive which took him there while listening to the performance. Miss Thomas was not impressionable. She would have heard the silver trumpets at St. Peter's, or seen the Pope give his benediction at Easter to kneeling thousands, unmoved, or moved only by anger at such mummery. She denounced church music and decoration, the confessional, transubstantiation, mariolatry, hagiology—all with equal strength and sincerity. So there was little to choose between politics and religion as a subject for discussion. Mr. Radclyffe vowed he hated a woman who argued, yet he was incessantly throwing down the gauntlet, and she was not proof against the temptation to take it up, in spite of the hints thrown out by Horace, and of one or two very mild lectures he ventured on. She protested she had no intention of either arguing or losing her temper. She merely wished for information. Why should Mr. Radclyffe say so and so? In theory, she hardly called her soul her own before a man—"Men know so much better than we do," was her motto; but the theory was inconvenient in practice, so she did not trouble herself to carry it very far.

"Of course if you wish me not to talk politics, Horace, I won't."

And she did not—till the next time.

They were to be married in February. The *trousseau* and marriage settlements were a work of time. Meanwhile she spent Christmas at Leighton Court, where

Mr. and Mrs. Radclyffe also passed that season. A happy woman was Mrs. Radclyffe, as she saw her daughter the presiding goddess of the place, and bright and full of spirits as she had never been at Deerscourt.

"I always said, my dear, if she was only married she would be quite happy; of course I mean married to such a man as dear George."

"For Heaven's sake, Mary, write and get Blanche Seymour here," said Mr. Radclyffe to his wife, the day after their return from Leighton Court. I can't stand your Miss Thomas alone any longer. When is she going away?"

"Not till the last week in January, when she goes to Lady Glennorth's."

"I won't have them to live here, Mary, mind that."

This was Mrs. Radclyffe's new trouble. It had been arranged that Horace and his wife should live at Deerscourt. Mr. Radclyffe had always expressed a wish that his son should do so, but now his daughter-in-law so alarmed him that he drew back, and no entreaties would induce him to consent to the plan.

Miss Thomas had objected to it at first, but had yielded out of deference to Horace's wishes, and now it was difficult to break to her that it was not to be carried out. A battery of exhortation, coaxing, and scolding was brought to bear on Mr. Radclyffe, but hitherto without effect. He refused to announce his decision to his son himself, leaving that pleasing task to his wife.

"How am I to tell dear Horace that you won't let him live here?" pleaded Mrs. Radclyffe.

"I'm sure I don't care how you tell him, so as you make him understand that I won't have that woman in my house."

"It is so unkind of you, Charles, after it all has all been settled!"

"So it may be, but I'll be hanged if I'll live with your Miss Thomas! If your son, Colonel Radclyffe, chooses to marry such a creature let him provide a home for her. She has plenty of money."

Whenever Mr. Radclyffe's children did anything not agreeable to him he repudiated all part in them, and spoke to his wife of "your son" or "your daughter."

"It will be so dull here now dear Leila is gone," urged the lady.

"I'd rather by half have the dullness than that woman's tongue. She would talk the head off a parson. Get Blanche to come here."

Deerscourt was very dull without Leila and her surroundings. A house suddenly deprived of its youth is a dismal place. People don't appreciate, till they are deprived of it, the brightness imparted to their lives by having round them clear, joyous young voices and gay spirits, the ready laugh and light jest of childhood and youth. These keep hope ever green in the heart. That element of happiness never totally disappears where there is a young voice to keep it alive.

The great object of Mrs. Radclyffe's life had been to get her daughter married, and now that that object was accomplished she felt a dreary blank. It is true she had still her husband and son to look after and be anxious about, and it was improbable that their conduct would be such as to deprive her of the privilege of being uneasy about them, but they would not allow her to fuss over them and expend all her love on them as Leila did. Some women cannot live without something to pet and take care of. It is a necessity of their nature. They are devoid of that mysterious possession of the *femme incomprise*, "an inner life," and must have tangible objects to expend their energies on. It was a merciful dispensation of Providence in one way which gave Mrs. Radclyffe a troublesome husband, a daughter who took men *en horreur*, and sons who were a perpetual anxiety to her. She would have eaten her heart out had she had an easy, unruffled life of it: and now beneficent Providence had provided her a fresh source of trouble, and, consequently, of happiness, in Miss Tryphena. But if she was not to be under her roof she would be of comparatively little use. A grievance which is a long way off is, for practical purposes, of no value.

She wrote to Mrs. Seymour entreating that Blanche, who was coming to visit Leila soon, might come to her first, "just to keep Charles quiet, my dear Fanny, till Tryphena goes away." Mrs. Radclyffe eschewed the name of "Polly." She was also diplomatically unaware of that little episode in the lives of Horace and Blanche, and asked her to come without any hesitation. She knew her son to be very prudent.

Blanche had nothing to live for now but to be of use and do all the good she could. She devoted herself to her mother, and took a large share of Geoffrey's district visiting, into which she threw herself with eager, feverish earnestness.

Cynics say that we take to philan

thropy when happiness is gone, as old people begin to think of heaven when they can no longer enjoy earth. The cynics are partly right, but philanthropy is a better thing to take to than cynicism, and a more effectual cure for disappointed hopes; so Blanche left Heathfield, where she and her mother had spent Christmas, a fortnight sooner than she had intended, to enable her to visit Deerscourt, painful as it was to her to do so, before she went to Leighton Court, where her mother and the Maynards were to join her in three weeks. Three weeks! They would soon pass—yet Mrs. Seymour and Mabel felt a vague, undefined uneasiness they could not account for at the separation from her; still there was no tangible objection to her going, if she wished it.

"Blanche," said Mabel, "do you remember how uneasy we felt one night before you went to Deerscourt when we lived in Cadogan Place?"

"I do."

"I feel just as nervous now—as full of vague fears. I wonder what it can be."

"Nothing, dear, any more than it was then."

Mabel felt, but did not say, that she dated the blighting of her sister's bright, happy life from that visit.

"Do you feel any *presentiment*, or foreboding?" she asked.

"None in the world, dear. I would rather not go till you and mamma do; otherwise I feel nothing about it but dread of Tryphena's voice."

It was not so with Mabel and her mother. They could not shake off the sickening fears which haunted them.

What are these mysterious foreshadowings—these presentiments which beset us at times, foreboding or seeming to forebode some coming disaster? Does our Guardian Angel, indeed, whisper to our soul, and bid it prepare for the pending blow? On every side of us is the mighty spirit world, of which our grosser, mundane senses are only dimly conscious—very frequently, totally unconscious. In what unknown way do these spirits which surround us hold commune with that immortal part of us which will one day free itself from its material prison, and go forth to meet its sister spirit, and know even as it is known?

What mysterious force sometimes weighs us down with unaccountable depression, making the sun at noonday black? In some natures the spiritual so far predominates over the material element that their life is a constant torture to them. Their

capacities for enjoyment and suffering are alike enormous, and they are keenly susceptible to every passing event. They are so sympathetic, and highly organized, that the knowledge of the boundless misery and wrong with which the world is filled overpowers them with a melancholy they cannot shake off. In such cases it is not difficult to see how dismal foreshadowings of evil should overcast the soul. People thus sensitive go forth to meet misfortune. Their minds are so constituted that they readily receive impressions of gloom. But *presentiments* come equally to the unthinking and the essentially material; not indeed strongly, and they may only be remembered after the event has justified them; but they do come. Even those who would scoff most at such a theory acknowledge the existence of mysterious warnings when they tremble at the fall of a looking-glass or picture, and grow pale at the humming of a harmless insect.

But of what value are such forebodings? Did they ever prevent a disaster? The wretched woman taken by her murderous, brutal husband to walk by the river in which he meant to drown her "felt a creeping fear and was all of a shiver," yet did she not heed her Guardian Angel's voice, but went on to her doom. Did Brutus avoid Philippi, though warned he should meet his evil *genius* there? Did the mighty Guise absent himself from the Council Chamber that winter morning, though many a presage foreshadowed his end? *On n'oserait*; and he went on to his fate.

"Enterprises of great plth and moment"

cannot

"With this intent

Their current turn aside, and lose the name of action."

The fatalist says, we must dree our doom; the Christian, we must act, and leave the result in His hands who guards the issues of life and death.

CHAPTER LVII.

MR. RADCLYFFE and Miss Thomas had had a battle royal at breakfast over the administration of justice in our privileged country. Miss Thomas, of course, maintained that everything was perfect and our judges consistent to the last degree. Mr. Radclyffe, though he would have

held that opinion with any one else, now, on the contrary, inveighed in the strongest language against the inequality with which the law was carried out and the caprice of its exponents, a miserable, half-sane mother being condemned to ten years' penal servitude for letting her sickly infant die through neglect, while a man who murders his wife with circumstances of awful brutality is let off with six months of hard labor, though found guilty by the jury. It was a disgrace to a civilized country, Mr. Radclyffe declared; and he was right.

"I quite agree with you, Uncle Charles," said Blanche; "it is horrible to think of."

"Of course you agree with me. So would every one with heart or feeling," said he, forgetting how recently he had adopted the view. Miss Thomas defended herself warmly against the charge of heartlessness, protesting that she would not hurt a fly. The disputants got so warm and words waxed so high that all attempts to stem the current of their wrath were vain, and the *assistants* could only hope they would soon be exhausted by their own violence. At last, after a *tu quoque* more irritating than usual from the lady, Mr. Radclyffe started up and strode out of the room in furious anger. Miss Thomas at once turned to her lover to explain her argument, her face crimson and her voice trembling.

"I think it is a great pity you argue with my father," said Horace gravely. She immediately burst into tears. No wonder. She had been arguing instead of eating her breakfast, and was quite exhausted. Blanche prudently rose to leave the room, and Mrs. Radclyffe followed her example.

"What shall I do, Blanche? I see it will never do for her to live here: yet she is making all her arrangements for it. It will kill me if this goes on." Mrs. Radclyffe's vitality was so enormous that it would take a great deal to kill her, but such scenes were certainly trying to the nerves.

In order to keep the combatants apart and prevent a repetition of the same thing at lunch-time, she proposed to the young ladies to drive over to Leighton Court and spend the day with Leila. "That will give them both time to calm down, my dear."

Leila received them with delight, but whispered to Blanche, "Percy Vivian is here. He came unexpectedly last night."

"How tiresome! I suppose, however,

he won't come into your boudoir, so I need not see him."

"Leila," said Miss Thomas, "I have the greatest ambition to go on the river. Could we go this morning?"

"Yes, if George can come; it is not safe without him."

"Oh! I don't mean with him. Can't we go by ourselves? I can row anywhere."

"Not on the river: it is full of rocks, and very dangerous unless you know it well."

But Tryphena was urgent, the more so when she found herself opposed. "Are you afraid, Blanche?" she asked, rather contemptuously turning from Leila.

"I won't go without George; it would be absurd, when he says it is not safe."

"I thought you had more spirit. I tell you I can row."

"I will go and ask George," said Leila, willing to gratify her; "he is not shooting to-day, and will come with us I am sure."

This was not what Miss Thomas wanted, but she had to submit, as Blanche would not go with her alone.

The Leigh was a most picturesque river, full of all sorts of pretty curves and bends, but so rocky that it could only safely be navigated by a boatman experienced in its ways, and who knew exactly what part of the stream was *boatable*.

"George, darling," said Lady Conway, penetrating into her husband's den, "Miss Thomas has taken it into her head to go on the river. Can you come with us?"

"What on earth does she want to do that for?" Leila shrugged her shoulders.

"Will you come? she says she will go alone if you don't; — that she is not afraid."

"If she does she will run a pretty good chance of being drowned. However, I'm at your service. The river is full after all this rain, so we can go very well."

Whatever misgivings Leila had had about marrying she had evidently got over. She looked the picture of radiant happiness, standing beside Sir George, her hand on his shoulder as he sat folding up a letter.

"Papa and Miss Polly had a tremendous fight at breakfast, George, and then Horace scolded her, and she wept copiously, so mamma has sent her over here to get rid of her for a few hours, and we come in for the ground-swell after the storm. She is in a most cantankerous frame of mind."

"I say, Leila, let us set her and Percy at each other. What a joke it would be to see them have a sparring-match!"

"He never speaks to her, almost; besides, Blanche doesn't want to see him."

"Ah! Blanche is like somebody else I know who tried to run away from her fate; but her fate was too much for her, eh?"

"Not quite like, George; I think your runaway cared for you even when she ran away, but Blanche is utterly indifferent to Percy."

"Nevertheless, having experienced the benefit of perseverance in my own case, I have recommended him not to throw up the game. Beauty was made to be won, eh, Lady Conway?"

"If you keep on perpetually boasting of your triumphs, Sir George, I shall go away."

He caught her round the waist. "Why shouldn't I boast? Now you will be good enough to confess the real, honest truth to me before I let you go. Should you like to be Miss Radclyffe again, and leave me and go and live at Deerscourt?"

"As I never can be Miss Radclyffe again, we won't discuss the matter."

"I beg your pardon, we will discuss it. I asked you a question and mean to have an answer. Would you like to be Miss Radclyffe again and leave me?"

"I shall not answer you."

"Shall not, indeed! Know, my lady Conway, that you are bound to obey me, so I insist on your answering whatever I choose to ask."

"I may be bound to obey you, but I'm not bound to tell you the truth; so if I say I should not like to be Miss Radclyffe again, you may know it is not the case. Let me go now, George. It is very rude of me leaving my guests in this way."

"Not a bit of it! Answer me without any subterfuge, or you don't move."

"How tiresome you are!"

*"The neighbors all said till I named the day,
I should never get rid of Reilly."*

"I should not like to leave you now, because if I did you would never leave me, but persecute me as you did before. There! are you satisfied?"

"No: you've grown uncommonly impudent since you've been married. You never used to say these sort of things. I took you for the meekest and demurest of your sex."

"'Evil communications corrupt good manners.' What can you expect when I live with you?"

After some delay they started for the river. It was a mild day; the sky was blue and there was a spring-like feeling in the air, though it was only January.

Snowdrops and crocuses were peeping up, to be summarily cut off by February frosts and relentless March winds.

"How delightful it is!" exclaimed Miss Thomas, when they were in the boat. "Do you often come here, Leila? I should live on this river if I were you."

"No; I don't often come. Never, without George, and he is out hunting generally."

"Oh, I should come alone. I should soon learn to know the safe parts. I should amuse myself here while he was hunting."

"This river is *défendu*, Miss Thomas," said Sir George, laughing and looking at Leila, "unless I am here to keep guard."

"I think I should feel disposed to try and guard myself, Sir George. I should soon learn to manage the boat here." He did not answer.

"You think I ought not to wish to come when you pronounce it unsafe," she went on. She was never so happy as when she could provoke a discussion, no matter what about. It was from no unamiable motive. It was merely that it interested her to discuss everything with everybody, and the suitability of time and place never occurred to her.

"I presume you have no confidence in my judgment, Miss Thomas; if my friend, Horace, said it was unsafe, I suppose it would be different."

"No indeed; not a bit," said she in her shrill voice.

"That is a bad lookout for him!" said he laughing. "I hope you won't teach my wife to be a rebel, Miss Thomas. She is very amenable at present."

"I didn't ask her to come to-day. I only wanted to come myself. I still say I could learn to manage the boat."

"I have no doubt of it, Miss Thomas: only I should never think it safe for a lady to come on this river alone unless she could swim very well."

"Let me have the oars now, and you tell me where to go."

He shook his head. "It would not be safe, I assure you. You have no idea what careful management it requires."

"Do you mean that it is really so unsafe?" she asked with an energetic jerk.

"Really. We were all but on that rock then." A slight, grating noise was heard. She turned very pale. "Then why did we come? you ought not to have brought us."

"You wished to come," said Leila.

"But I did not know it was really dangerous; how could I? People have a way of saying everything is dangerous. Mrs.

Radclyffe has, and I thought it was only that, or because you did not want me to come."

"We are quite safe, dear," said Blanche soothingly, "don't be frightened;" for Miss Thomas's face was becoming every moment whiter.

"He says it is not safe."

"Miss Thomas, it would be dangerous for you to take the oars; it is not so when I have them, provided you sit still; I really cannot answer for the consequences, if you don't."

But a sudden panic had seized her. She kept on grasping the boat with one hand and Blanche's arm with the other, her lips compressed—the picture of terror, ready to jump on the slightest alarm. She was one of those women, fool-hardy till they are in the presence of real danger, when they become pa a with fear and lose all power of self-control.

"Oh, do let us go back," she implored. "Can't we get out now?"

"Miss Thomas," said Sir George, "do you suppose I would bring my wife here if I thought it unsafe? There is not the least danger if you will sit still."

But to sit still was beyond her ability now. She started and plunged with each movement of the boat, placing them all in imminent danger of an upset every moment.

"I really must insist on your sitting still," said Sir George at last rather sternly.

"Oh, do let us get out! I demand to be put out. Pull to the bank!" she shrieked in tragic tones.

"I will, as soon as I can, but it is impossible to turn or pull ashore just here; there are too many rocks."

They went on some way farther, Miss Thomas making a series of the most hideous grimaces, and livid from intense fright.

"Can't we get out here, George?" asked Leila. "She is so terrified."

"It will be easier lower down. There is a nasty rock just there."

Miss Thomas caught the word. "A rock?" she shrieked, with a tremendous plunge. "Oh, do let us get out. Let me out! Let me out! Oh, my God!"

"To the right, Leila!" shouted Sir George. (She was steering.) But it was too late. Crack went the cockleshell of a boat against a pointed rock, and the water began to come in with incredible rapidity.

He turned very pale. "Is it split?" asked Leila. He did not answer, but pulled in the oars and threw off his coat, heedless of Miss Thomas's shrieks.

"Blanche, I must take my wife first;

sit still and I will be back as quickly as ever I can. Now, Miss Thomas, I warn you, your safety depends on your being quiet. Don't be frightened, Blanche," and he plunged into the water, and lifting Leila out swam with her to the shore. The river was at this point deep and wide, but the rocks were so numerous near the banks on either side that the boat could only get to land at certain places, and at the rate it was filling it would sink before it could reach it, and they would all be left floating in the water. He deemed it, therefore, safer to take them one by one, and had no doubt whatever of being able to save all three; but he had to make a *détour* to avoid some rocks, which delayed him a little.

When Miss Thomas understood his intention she tried to seize his arm, but Blanche prevented her; then quite beside herself with terror, she uttered shriek after shriek, which unnerved the latter far more than the actual peril of their situation. It was vain to entreat her to be calm: she was beyond hearing anything—unconscious of all save her own danger.

Blanche looked for something to bail out the water, and not finding it took her own hat for the purpose. As well try to drain the ocean with a thimble. In spite of all her efforts the boat was visibly filling, and they were drifting gradually near a group of rocks which rose above the surface.

"Tryphena, do not scream so, dear. George will be back very soon, and will take you next."

"Oh, no, no; he can't be back in time! How cruel, how wicked of him to leave us!"

"He could not help it; he had to take his wife first. We are in God's hands now, as always, and ought to trust Him. You said you could row; will you try to keep the boat off the rocks?"

"No, no; I can't, I can't."

"Will you bail out the water then, and I will try." She took the oar and endeavored to guide the boat in some measure.

"Oh, don't, don't, you will upset it!" shrieked Miss Thomas; but a clear voice came across the water, "That's right—more to the left! More to the left!" It was Percy Vivian, who, walking near, had been attracted by the screams and at once perceived what had occurred.

To tear off his coat and plunge in after the boat was the work of an instant. "Don't be afraid, Blanche!" he exclaimed,

drawing near. "Thank God, I saw you: I'll take you across quite safe. Come."

"Take Miss Thomas first," she implored.

"No, by Heaven! You first, my dearest. I'll come back for her."

"I entreat you to take her. She is wild with terror; it is cruel to leave her. I am not afraid, and will sit still till you come back."

There was no time to parley. He took Miss Thomas, and Blanche was left alone. "There may not be time to save both," she thought, "and her life is worth much to Horace."

"I obey you, though unwillingly," Percy had said. "Stand up and push to the left as hard as you can."

She followed his injunctions, and as he struck out for the shore, bearing Tryphena, now almost lifeless from extreme terror, he turned his head for a moment, intense, passionate regret and yearning on his face, to look once more at the girl, standing alone in the fast-filling boat, trying with her frail strength to guide it away from the nearing rocks. She nodded to him, with a smile of encouragement, as if to reconcile him to having left her.

"I'm not afraid, Mr. Vivian. Don't be uneasy about me."

"My noble, true-hearted Blanche!" and he dashed with powerful strokes through the water.

The boat was hurrying down amid the rocks; it was, besides, so full that it must sink in a few minutes. Hitherto she had not felt frightened. She spoke the truth when she told Percy she was not afraid, but suddenly the horror of sinking into those boiling, seething waters among cold, slimy, greedy-looking fishes seized her with horrible vividness. She had seen the river netted once, and visions of voracious, savage pike, with their shark-like jaws, rose before her, adding a fanciful but not less real hideousness to her situation. Anything was better than falling among them. She looked round and saw how far distant both her deliverers were. She must be dashed on the rocks or the boat must sink before they could reach her. She planted the oar as firmly as she could on a rock which rose near, and attempted to spring on to it, but it was green and very slippery, and her grasp of the oar was not firm enough. It slipped as she sprang, and the fair, white forehead came with violent and fatal force against the unrelenting rock.

With all the speed of despair and heroic energy both George and Percy, having safely landed their burdens, hastened back to the boat. A sickening feeling of horror, which almost deprived him of the power of motion, seized the latter when he saw it empty. A white handkerchief was floating on the water. He dashed forward—the "strong swimmer in his agony"—not for himself, but for that dearer life which he would have given his own—how willingly at that moment!—to save. Weighted with her heavy winter dress and velvet jacket, she had sunk, but a bit of her blue silk necktie rose to the surface for an instant. He dashed forward and seized her just as George too came up. He bore her to the bank, and thence reverently in his arms to the nearest cottage. He never spoke except to tell George to send for a doctor. The fair face was not distorted or disfigured, save for the ghastly cut on the forehead, which told its own tale—a tale he would not—could not believe.

Leila and Miss Thomas followed close behind, too much horrified to utter a word. The doctor came. Everything was tried; but there was never a doctor could avail, as George had felt the moment he saw her. The sweet spirit had gone back to heaven from whence it came. She had not been drowned. She had been killed by the fall.

It would be hopeless to attempt to describe the grief and consternation which overwhelmed the whole party, when all remedies had failed, and there was no denying the appalling truth.

Percy threw himself on his knees by the lowly cottage bed on which lay all that was mortal of her he had loved so well, in speechless agony. He knew, if no one else did, that she had been faithful unto death. That the faith was to another, not to himself, did not lessen the transports of his grief.

"How would the awful news be broken to Mrs. Seymour, and by whom?" This was the question every one asked in dismay. Leila, for whom dry clothes had been procured, started with her husband to Deerscourt to inform her parents, and then George and Mrs. Radclyffe left at once for Heathfield.

Horace and his father were out, and Leila awaited their return. "Good God! it's impossible! it's impossible! Not Blanche—you don't mean Blanche!" was all the old gentleman could say.

"Why did Vivian leave her?" asked Horace in a low voice.

"She would not go. She insisted on his taking Tryphena first."

He left the room without a word. For the next half-hour he forgot Miss Thomas as completely as if she had never existed. After looking for him for some time, Leila found him walking up and down the shrubbery, his dark face deadly white.

"Horace, darling, the carriage is here. You must come back with me to Leighton Court. Poor Tryphena is in such a state—perhaps you may be able to calm her."

"Leila," said he in a hollow voice, "why does everything I love die? Alice first—and now Blanche. I bring misfortune to all I come near."

She would not reproach him then, though she felt bitterly how his conduct had blighted the life and broken the heart which had trusted him so completely.

Of all who were overwhelmed by this dreadful calamity no one was more to be pitied than Miss Thomas. She felt that—however innocently—she was the cause of it; and as grief frequently, indeed, almost always, makes people both unjust and ungenerous, every one blamed her unhesitatingly, except Horace, whose admirable prudence restrained him from any open expression of his feelings, whatever may have been his secret sentiments.

When Mrs. Radclyffe and Sir George arrived at Heathfield late at night in a fly, the simultaneous exclamation of Mrs. Seymour and Mabel was, "Something has happened to Blanche!"

"What is it?" asked the former, hurrying into the hall. "Tell me quick."

They had intended seeing Charles first, but this prevented it. How were they to tell? what words were gentle enough or merciful enough to break such tidings?

"What is it?" she repeated imperiously. Then, as Mrs. Radclyffe, unable to speak, hesitated—"Answer me; she must be alive."

Their faces were answer enough.

"Tell me how it happened." It was soon told.

"My child! My beautiful Blanche!" was all the mother said, and went to her room to hide her agony from mortal eyes.

'What is good for a bootless bene?'

The falconer to the lady said;
And she made answer—'Endless sorrow,'
For she knew that her son was dead."

Mabel and Charles were stunned. The group in the hall, servants and all, looked for the moment as if turned to stone: the wife, clinging to her husband's arm on one side; Sir George and Mrs. Radclyffe on the other. The two latter had thought

over many ways of softening the intelligence they had to bear, but Mrs. Seymour's fears had obviated any such possibility. Her sad forebodings were now too fully justified.

* * * * *
"Lay her in the earth, and from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets grow."

Light snow-showers were falling, and covering the earth with a pure, white mantle, as a group of people, all clad in deepest black, entered the church where Blanche Seymour was to be laid to rest beside her father. Of all the possessions which had once given the Seymours a name in the county, this cheerless vault, where no pleasant sunshine ever gleamed, was the sole remnant. The grave is a landed estate of which the very poorest cannot be deprived.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay. In the midst of life we are in death."

"I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, from henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: even so, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labors."

Geoffrey's deep voice shook so that he could hardly read, and a convulsive sob broke from Leila and Emily. Mabel and her mother stood side by side tearless.

The last words were said, and there was a solemn silence. Suddenly a ray of winter sunshine came gleaming through the many-colored east window and rested—an emblem of glorious hope—on the grave. Mabel took her mother's hand to draw her attention to it, and saw that the same ray was lighting up her face.

The mourners moved away, slowly, reluctantly, as if unable to leave the spot, and then a gentleman, also habited in deepest black, advanced from behind a pillar to the vault, and stood, with folded arms, looking into it. He gazed long and earnestly, and then turned abruptly away, to see, close beside him, Horace Radclyffe.

"I did not know you were here, Vivian," said Horace in a low voice. The agony so deeply impressed on Percy's face struck him with a feeling almost of alarm.

"I had no claim to intrude myself at such a moment on her family. Where is—her mother? I should like to speak to her now." His voice was so changed that Horace hardly recognized it.

"She is just outside." They left the church together. Thus the two who had quarreled over her for so long met at last in peace by the grave where all was still.

They found Mrs. Seymour in the porch, waiting for the carriage. Horace turned away when he had shown Percy where she was. He took her hand. "Even you cannot grieve for her more than I do," he said gently; "but we know there is an angel more in heaven to-day."

"True," she answered. "It is well with my child, I feel; but it is ill with me, Mr. Vivian,—ill with me. You can't know how my heart aches to hear her voice. By God's mercy I shall join her soon—very soon."

* * * * *

"We gladlier rest
Our darlings on earth's quiet breast,
And our hearts feel they must not break.
Far better they should rest awhile
Within the church's shade,
Nor wake until new heaven, new earth,
Meet for their new immortal birth,
For their abiding-place be made,
Than wander back to earth, and lean
On our frail love once more."

This was Mrs. Seymour's feeling, after the first great shock was over. Death was not to her the awful messenger he is to some. Rather did she look on him as the gate through which she should joyfully pass to a glorious immortality. She lingered a few weeks, and then followed her child to the land that is very far off, "where beyond these voices there is peace."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE nuptials of Horace and Miss Thomas were deferred till April. Her grief and remorse for the catastrophe she had occasioned were so deep that Mr. Radclyffe was softened, and consented to her living at Deerscourt. After the marriage Horace did not fail to point a moral on the evil results of political and religious discussions with such a man as his father; and though to repress her completely was an impossibility, yet he succeeded in inducing her to exercise a considerable amount of self-restraint.

The intercourse between her and her mother-in-law was of the queerest. Tryphena and her ways were a never-ceasing source of astonishment to Mrs. Radclyffe. The two were thoroughly antagonistic to

each other; and though there was no open warfare between them—Mrs. Radclyffe was much too prudent to allow things to come to such a pass—yet a state of armed neutrality may be said to have been their normal condition. They tried each other mutually, and when, later on, a baby came, the management of which was a further bone of contention, it can only be attributed to the special interposition of Providence on its behalf that the wretched infant did not succumb under the different systems of treatment to which it was subjected;—the mother advocating a hardy style of bringing up, while the grandmother was in favor of a milder regimen. She pointed triumphantly to her own children as the best proof of the correctness of her theory. "Where are there any handsomer or stronger men in the world than my sons? Look at Horace! Show me a nobler-looking man! and Charlie is magnificent, though he will live abroad!" (Charlie was her eldest son. Why magnificent men should not live abroad as well as in England she did not explain.) "Then see Leila! there is no one in the county to be compared to her! Dear George says she grows handsomer every day. *She* is the wise girl who takes her mother's advice; and what a beauty her sweet baby is in consequence!"

Mr. Radclyffe rarely had discussions with his daughter-in-law himself now, but he was not above deriving amusement from setting her and his wife by the ears on the subject of babies, and morally holding the sponge while they had a vigorous *set-to*, and pitted the results of their favorite systems against each other.

On the whole the marriage turned out, as Blanche Seymour had predicted, better than might have been expected. Living at Deerscourt was productive of one advantage. It provided so many irritants that the husband and wife were unable to study the moles on each other's faces so completely as they would have done had they enjoyed their own society exclusively. Horace neither ill-used nor neglected his wife, nor did he waste her substance in riotous living and leave her and her children beggars, as often happens in such marriages. He devoted himself more and more to sport—lived for nothing else, in fact;—whatever there had been in him of high and noble aspiration disappeared completely, choked by the gross materialism which gradually gained entire possession of him. He sold out of the army, and England might have become a

province of France, or a dependency of America, and little would he have recked, provided his shooting and his French cook were not interfered with. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Nearly two years had passed away since Percy Vivian had seen Blanche Seymour laid in her last resting-place on that snowy January day. He had gone abroad directly afterwards. He belonged to that genus *Britannicum* which flies to the Continent for refuge whenever any calamity, domestic or otherwise, befalls. But at last he wearied of his wanderings.

"Natures whose roots strike deep
Clear their own way and win to light in growing."

He returned to England, resolved to give up his nomadic ways and settle down to be of some use in some way. He was aged, and his hair and moustache grizzled, but the face, though older, was not harder, and its expression was less self-satisfied, though discontented and unhappy.

He arrived unexpectedly at Glennorth to find a large party assembled there for Christmas, the Maynards and Ralph Seymour, the Conways and Geoffrey and Emily Rivers, among the number. Ralph had not yet thrown up the appointment Percy had got him. Indeed, as there was little to do and a high salary, there was a probability that he would favor the government and his friends by keeping it. He was more magnificent and grandiose than ever, and had added to his reputation by assuming the character of a determined *célibataire* and carefully guarding himself against the attacks of the sex.

Lady Conway had not yet had any reason to regret having become so. Emily Rivers's baby, whose infantile illness had been the cause of her refusing Sir George at Ryde, was grown into a stout boy, whose magnificent beauty was a source of great pride to his parents and of openly-expressed envy to Lady Glennorth.

The young gentleman, who accompanied his father and mother for their few days' visit to Glennorth, ran a very fair chance of being completely ruined from suddenly finding himself the object of universal attention. "How much will you take for him, Mrs. Rivers?" was a question put daily by Lady Glennorth.

"Would you like to leave mamma and papa, Geof, and come and live here always?" asked Emily.

"You should have a pony," said Lady Glennorth.

"I have a pony in London," said the boy, "and mamma and baby would have no one to take care of them."

"They would have papa," said Lady Glennorth.

"Papa isn't enough; he is out all day; he says, too, that mamma used to cry till she had me to make her feel jolly, so I could not leave her." He had lost his front teeth, and lisped it all out in the most enchanting manner.

"What would I give if you had a boy like that, Percy?" said Lord Glennorth. "Why don't you marry and settle down like a respectable Englishman, instead of smoking your life away in Italy and Turkey?"

The lake at Glennorth was a sheet of ice,—real, thick, honest ice, on which people could skate without fear of a wetting. The air was crisp and clear, and every one was out-of-doors—every one except Edythe Conway, who dared not venture herself among the gay throng on the lake. She was standing by the window in the morning-room, looking somewhat enviously and longingly at the skaters with that feeling of *being excluded* which invariably comes over people when witnessing gayeties they do not share. The gayeties may be doleful to the last degree, but that does not lessen the dislike to being shut out from them.

She was intently watching Geoffrey Rivers guiding Emily and little Geof; then her thoughts went to another pair of skaters she had once watched, when a voice close to her brought the blood surging to her face.

"I suppose you are afraid to venture out?" it said, and Percy Vivian came and stood by the window beside her, resting his arm on the frame.

"Yes—no—yes," she answered, startled out of all self-possession.

"It is rather dull work looking at them when you can't join them," he said kindly.

"Well, I confess I was thinking how happy they all seemed," she returned, recovering her equanimity. She was one of those girls who improve in looks as they grow older. She was infinitely handsomer now than she had been five years before, and her figure, always good, had acquired a grace and dignity which sat on her very well, while her frank, open manner added a charm peculiarly her own.

"Could you not venture to walk to the lake? you need not stay."

"I thought so," she replied, smiling.

"but Aunt Kate and George are such tyrants they would not hear of it. and they keep me in such order, I had to submit."

They were silent for some minutes, then he said suddenly, "Edythe, do you ever think of—Blanche Seymour?" He had never pronounced the name since that fatal day, and hesitated before doing so now.

Miss Conway felt a blinding sensation before her eyes. Why did he call her by her Christian name?

"I was thinking of her when you came in. How beautifully she used to skate! I shall never forget her and Horace Radclyffe skating together on the lake at Leighton Court. It was the prettiest thing I ever saw! Did you ever see her skate?"

"Very often." Another pause; then—

"Did you know that I had asked her to be my wife, and that she refused?" He was still looking out of the window, not now at the gay crowd on the lake, but away into the blue sky, as if seeking to penetrate beyond.

"I did," she answered in a low voice.

"Her refusal was the greatest misfortune of my life: she was the only woman I had ever loved. Had she lived I should never have married any one else."

"I was very sorry that she would not—would not accept you," said Edythe honestly. "She would have made you very happy; and would have been with us now, in all human probability, had she done so."

"These things are in the Almighty's hands," he said solemnly.

"I think," said she, "that God sometimes sends angels on earth in mortal shape to do some special work, and when it is done recalls them to heaven again."

"I don't know how that may be," he said, "but she was my good angel. She first taught me how much nobler he is who does even the smallest amount of actual good to his fellow-creatures than one who sneers at everything for being what it is without proposing any remedy by which it can be made better."

Miss Conway had forgotten the skaters and her wish to join them.

He withdrew his arm from the window, and turning, looked at her. "I had an object in telling you this. I wished you to know. Had she lived I never could have thought of any one else as my wife—now—" he stopped suddenly, and she,

covered with blushes and not knowing which way to look, bent her head to avoid his eyes. "You are so generous and noble, Edythe, that you will understand how, feeling towards her as I did, I can yet say to you now—I love you, and ask for your love in return. Can you give it to me?"

Her blushes brought tears into her eyes, and she simply could not utter a word. She had loved him so long and with so little hope of ever meeting any return, that she had tried to school her heart to forget him—tried, but not very effectually; yet now, when he asked for her love, she felt guilty, as if he had known her secret all along, and could not answer him. He quite mistook her silence.

"Don't distress yourself," he said with forced calmness; "I suppose it is my usual fate. I know I am not a man calculated to please a lady—"

"No, no!" she exclaimed, hastily wiping the tears off her burning face; "I think you are the noblest, the best—" She stopped, unable to command her voice, but he understood and completed the sentence in his own way. "My dearest Edythe!" and they prudently withdrew from the window.

An hour passed, and so absorbed were they in each other, that they did not hear approaching voices.

"Well, my dear old woman, how have you been getting on?" "My darling Edythe, I'm afraid you have been very dull!" exclaimed Sir George and Lady Conway simultaneously as they opened the door. They stopped suddenly, as well they might. Percy and Edythe were sitting on the sofa, his arm round her waist and her hand clasped in his, a position he deliberately retained in spite of her brother's astonished exclamation, "Hallo! I say—what's all this?" and her own violent start. She colored furiously, trying to free herself, but he kept his hold, though he rose and went forward with her to meet his friend.

"George, your sister and I have been having some conversation while you have been out skating. She says she thinks you would not object to me as a brother-in-law, though I am twice her age almost, and my hair is not as black as it has been. Is she right?"

"My dear fellow! my darling Edie!" exclaimed George, while Edythe, escaping from her lover, threw herself into his arms. "It is the very thing I have always wished for," he went on, giving

him his disengaged hand. "My dear Percy! if I had had my choice in all England of the man I would trust her to, it would have been you; and I cannot wish you a better fate than to have such a wife as she will be to you."

"George, let me kiss her," said Leila. "You monopolize her altogether. My dearest Edythe, how little I expected this when we came in!"

"Well, if you and George won't let me go out," rejoined Edythe laughing, "what can you expect?"

"You little rebel!" said George. "How angry you were with me for making you stay in this afternoon. Percy, I hope you will keep her in better order than I have been able to do. She is a terrible termagant, I warn you."

"He won't keep me in on a lovely day when there is not a breath of wind and the sun is shining, as you do—will you?"

"Well, if I do, I will stay with you to keep you company."

Lord and Lady Glennorth were beside themselves with joy at the announcement. Percy submitted with a tolerable grace to the various trying circumstances attendant on his position. He was a very chivalrous and attentive lover, and Edythe was intensely happy.

Six months after this Mr. and Mrs. Vivian were sitting together on the sofa opposite the open French window of the drawing-room in their own home in Devonshire. The moon was making a glory of the sea as it surged up to the tree-fringed shore and swept back again with its never-ceasing song, like the rise and fall of the wind among the hills. The last faint trail of departing day was disappearing down the western sky, and the star of love was in attendance on the moon.

"Percy, will you answer me a question I want to ask you, honestly?" inquired Edythe.

"Certainly, if I can. What is it?"

"Are you quite happy and content now? I mean, happier than you were before you married?"

"Quite, Edie. I can honestly say so. I am happier than I ever was before or ever expected to be. Why did you ask?"

"Because I am so happy myself, that I wanted to be sure you were too."

"Are you so happy, dear?" he asked, putting his arm round her and kissing her.

"So happy, Percy! I did not think it

possible for any human being to feel such happiness as I do. I sometimes think it cannot last. I feel afraid of it."

"My dear one, why should it not last?" he said, drawing her closer to his side.

"Because if it did I should never want to leave this world. When did you first think of asking me to be your wife and making me so happy? I have always wanted to know. You used not to care for me."

"I always liked you, Edie," he replied laughing, "even in my unregenerate days, but I can hardly tell you when I first really thought of having you for my wife. You were associated in my mind with poor Blanche,—that had a good deal to do with it, and when I got George's letter at Athens saying how ill you had been and how uneasy they were about you, I began to think seriously that I should miss you if I went to Leighton Court and did not see you."

"Then you did think of me when you were abroad, Percy?"

"Sometimes, Edie. Very much so latterly; and if I had known you cared for me, why, perhaps, I might have come home a little sooner. Why did you not let me know?"

"I wonder why I did not. It would have been so womanly and nice, wouldn't it? Tell me how you first found it out."

"When I asked you, of course, and you began to cry."

"No; but what made you ask me?"

"Oh, various things. I had my little suspicions, you see, after I came home. When young ladies blush and look conscious, and from being very loquacious and authoritative—sometimes on subjects they don't know much about—suddenly become silent and amenable, why, then—"

"That is nonsense, Percy; I was not more silent then than I had always been."

"Oh, then, it must have been that I noticed it more as I found myself thinking a good deal of you and your ways. Does that solution satisfy you?"

"Quite; I don't much care for the cause as the effect is so delightful, and as you are happy. I want you to be as happy as I am."

"I am so, my dear Edie," he said.

They sat silent for some time watching the sea, then Edythe spoke again—"Percy, I always feel in some way, I hardly know how, indebted to dear Blanche Seymour for my present happiness. I should like to do something to commemorate it and

her. I was thinking of a window in the church, if you would not object."

"Of course not, dearest; and how would it be, Edie, if I began to build some decent cottages on the estate, instead of the hovels there are at present? She always told me I ought to do it, and said if she had been rich, it would have been her first work."

"That's the thing, Percy,—a much better memorial of her than a church window."

"We can have the window too, Edie."

"Well, let us begin with the cottages. It will be the first step towards using our gifts for the benefit of others, which was the watchword of her life."

THE END.

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